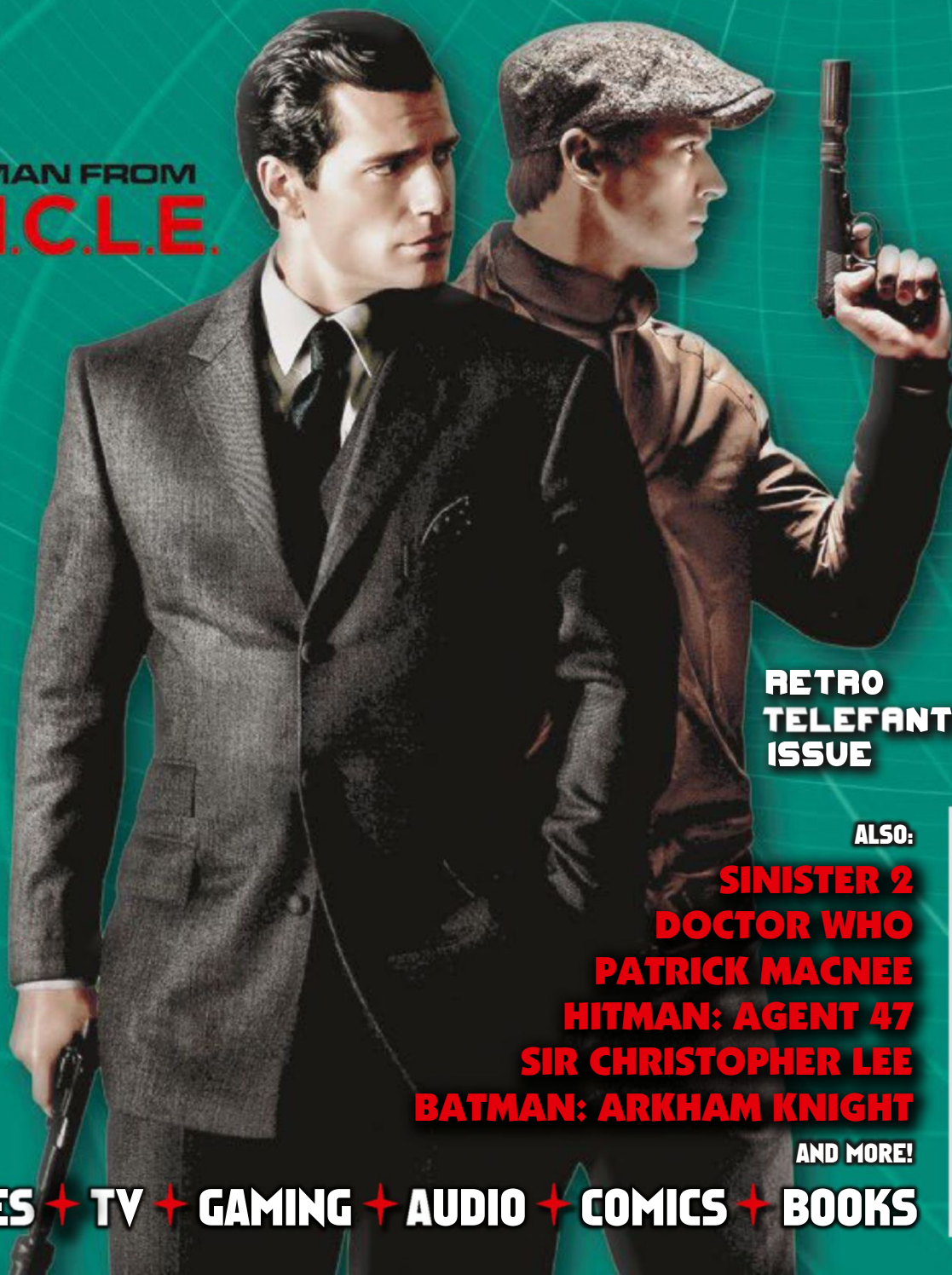


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★ STARBURST

THE MAN FROM
U.N.C.L.E.



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TELEFANTASY
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415**

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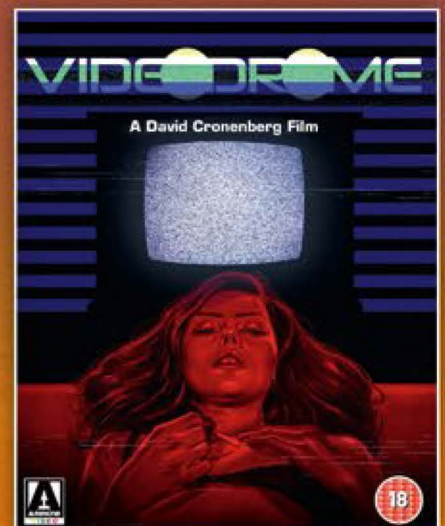
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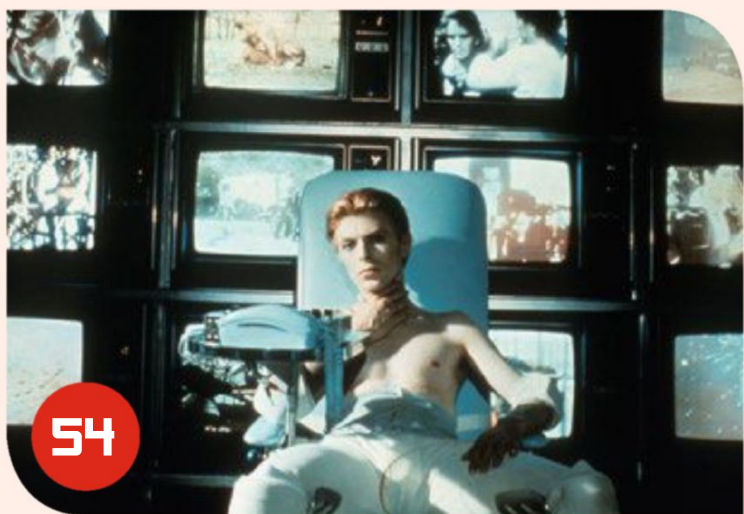
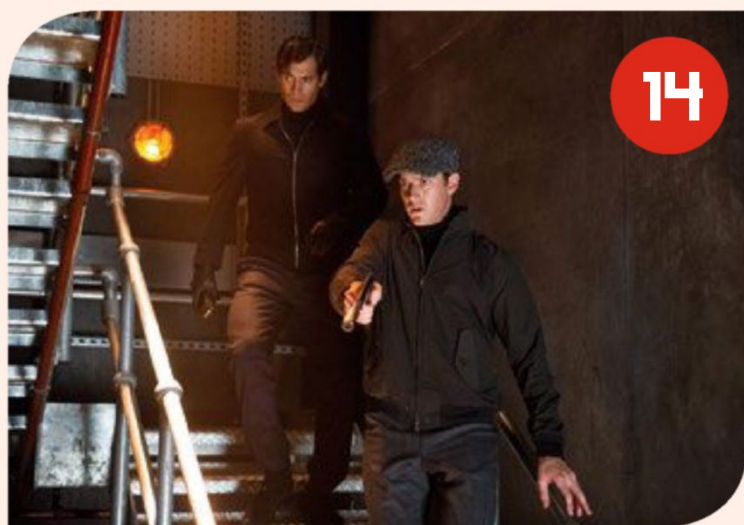
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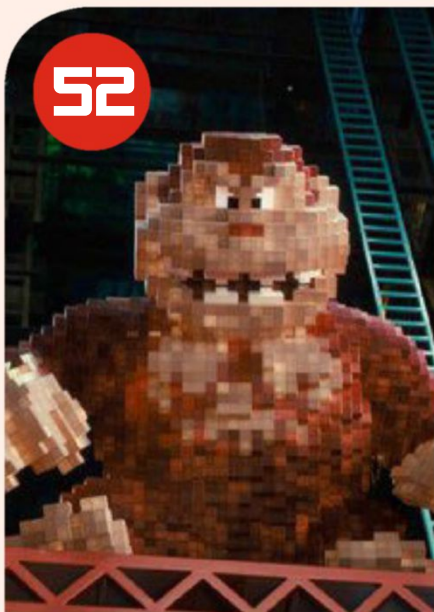
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EDITORIAL

Editor

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor

MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Honorary Editor-in-Chief

DEZ SKINN

Online Editor

ANDREW POLLARD
andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

Sequential Art Editor

ED FORTUNE
ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

Editorial Assistants

KIERON MOORE
JACK BOTTOMLEY

ART

Collectors' Edition Cover Artist

MARK REIHILL
markreihill.com

Art Director

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Art Director

SHAUNA ASKEW
shauna.askew@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Designer

JON ROBERTS

Interns

HANNAH BURGESS & TOM ACTON

ONLINE

Webmaster

JIM BOON
jim@starburstmagazine.com

THE GREATEST WRITING TEAM IN THE UNIVERSE

Head Writer

PAUL MOUNT
paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com

Lead Writers

LIVVY BOOTE, JACK BOTTOMLEY, DOMINIC CUTHBERT,
KATE FATHERS, ED FORTUNE, JOEL HARLEY, CHRIS JACKSON,
CHRISTIAN JONES, TONY JONES, JOHN KNOTT, ANDREW MARSHALL,
IAIN MCNALLY, KIERON MOORE, MARTIN UNSWORTH
STUART MULRAIN, ROBIN PIERCE, ANDREW POLLARD, LEE PRICE,
IAIN ROBERTSON, CALLUM SHEPHARD, JR SOUTHALL, NICK SPACEK,
ADAM STARKEY, JOHN TOWNSEND, PETE TURNER,

Contributors

TOM ACTON, JONATHAN ANDERSON, SOPHIE ATHERTON,
JENNIE BAILEY, VANESSA BERBEN, PHIL BERESFORD, SIMON BESSON,
NICK BLACKSHAW, FORD MADDOX BROWN, LARA BROWN,
P.M. BUCHAN, MARTYN CONTERIO, TONY COWIN, ALISTER DAVISON,
SPLEENY DOTSON, JD GILLAM, ANIMAL JOHNS,
ROBERT KEELING, ROD MCCANCE, NEIL MCNALLY, FRED MCNAMARA,
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DR KAREN OUGHTON, WARRICK HORSLEY, CLEAVER PATTERSON,
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JON TOWLSON, LEONA TURFORD, RICHARD THOMAS, SCOTT VARNHAM,
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PRESS

Press Liaison

PHIL PERRY
phil.perry@starburstmagazine.com

PLEASE SEND ALL PRESS RELEASES TO:
press@starburstmagazine.com

REVIEW MATERIALS

Please send all review materials to:
STARBURST MAGAZINE
PO BOX 4508
MANCHESTER
M61 0GY

EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 415.

As I have been saying for a while now in this very mag and on our radio show, 2015 has been a fantastic year for genre cinema so far, and with it's climax being a long overdue visit to that galaxy far, far away - This is shaping up to be an exceptional year. Sadly it has not come without a cost and it is with great sadness that this issue says goodbye to two more STARBURST titans.

If you are old enough, or curious enough to have looked over the first hundred issues of STARBURST, you would have been unable to escape the presence of both Christopher Lee (he hadn't been knighted then and was just our mate Chris), and Patrick Macnee. These guys were like family to many readers of a certain age. Christopher Lee leaves us an astonishing body of work, and helped get many horror fans hooked on their favourite genre of horror at an early age. Patrick Macnee defined the nature of the charming British gent, and with his character of John Steed again got many of us involved in this world of fantasy that STARBURST greatly benefitted from celebrating. To me these two guys will always be legends, and with the recent passing of Leonard Nimoy, well, it just feels like the end of an era. But what an era it was eh? Like I said, 2015 is bitter sweet, but these guys have left us an astonishing body of work, and we can spend time with them whenever we want.

You might have also noticed that this issue is devoted to my favourite retro tv series - **The Man From U.N.C.L.E.** Whilst also looking forward to seeing whether Guy Ritchie can resurrect this classic for a modern audience? We have also cheekily sneaked in a much promised trip into the world of Telefantasy (you lot asked for this week after week on the radio show).

We have also managed to fit in the much hyped **Pixels**, see what Bughuul is up to in **Sinister 2**, cover something completely different with the **Monty Python** team's **Absolutely Anything** and take a trip back to **Nightmare City**. There's all this and loads more, plus all of your regular fixes.

Don't forget to catch me and the STARBURST team Wednesdays 9pm until 11pm on the **The STARBURST Radio Show**, exclusive to **Fab Radio International**, or subscribe for free on iTunes. It's just no fun without you guys!

Until next issue,
keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR



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PUBLISHING

STARBURST PUBLISHING
2nd Floor, 60 Portland Street,
Manchester M1 4QT
0161 228 2332

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FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY
or email: letters@starburstmagazine.com

STAR

GIRL POWER, FROM PLANET X

I would just like to say I found the GIRL FROM PLANET X [Issue 414] article by Livvy Boote really interesting. I completely agree with her view that sadly female nerds or geeks (and I use this term affectionately) are not treated in the same way as their gender counterpart. You would have thought that having been out of the mainstream for so long until the 2000s at least, geeks would have an open door to anyone but I think it's a case of being territorial (hence *have you actually read...*). I also agree with her point about

sexualisation of women in sci-fi/fantasy etc. The comics are the worst culprits in their depiction of women. Female heroes are often portrayed in skimpy outfits or with exaggerations in their breasts. See any RED SONJA comic, VAMPIRELLA, CAT WOMAN etc. Come on DC/Marvel/Image etc, you can do better than this, raise the bar!

Maz K, via EMAIL

We agree, and it's not like Superman has to fight his enemies with an enormous 'Jareth-esque' bulge. Well, unless Rob Liefeld's been drawing him of course...

LETTER

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF B's

Once again, I find in your magazine something for everyone - I did enjoy your brief but informative article on the 'double-header' *There's Going to B Trouble*, about the back-to-back double feature movies. I can recall several of these - especially the Hammer ones like *PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES/THE REPTILE* & when I went to see *JASON & THE ARGONAUTS* on its initial release, it was doubled up with a movie called *SIEGE OF THE SAXONS* - just as enjoyable to a 10-year-old as the main feature! I remember one being with the original 300 SPARTANS, but cannot recall what it was! There was

also a great B-movie called *SON OF SPARTACUS* that was another double bill, but again... memory, you know, not what it was as I enter my 60th decade!

Also mentioned in the article was going to see a movie and getting in after it had started (lots of "excuse me, excuse me, sorry, was that your foot" and getting impatient sighs and mutterings as you did that peculiar sideways walk trying to get to a seat without interrupting others' pleasure! - the '68 version of *CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE & NORTHVILLE CEMETERY MASSACRE* automatically spring to mind although I am sure there were others.

And as you say, always ushered in before the interminable ads for curry houses, Kia-Ora - 'too orangey for crows' - and the old Pearl & Dean ads, by which time I had usually eaten all the popcorn, Poppets etc and drunk all the flipping Kia-Ora & had nothing

left for the movie!

Anyway - once again, thank you for a trip down cinematic memory lane!

Mike Bridgeman, via EMAIL

It's nice to still have some pleasant memories from those days, it takes us right back. We quite fancy a curry actually, though on reflection we're not sure about those Kia-Ora crows.

DESPERATELY SEEKING SNOW QUEEN

I used to get STARBURST regularly in the '80s and early '90s, then I lapsed. I bought an issue earlier this year for the first time in years, and I was pleased to discover on your letters page that you still take what is now known as 'snail mail'.

I was sorry to discover, quite recently, of the death of the original 'It's Only A Movie' writer, John Brosnan. I gather he was only 58 and that he had died ten years ago. He must have died around the time DOCTOR WHO became a big hit again - I remember how he had offended at least one DOCTOR WHO fan by writing a hatchet job on the show in his column!

However, this wasn't the original reason I decided to write to you. Back in the late '80s (1988 I believe), I read a review in STARBURST, or possibly TV ZONE, for a TV special which had been screened on Christmas Day in 1976. This production was called *THE SNOW QUEEN* and it had been released on VHS. I wish in hindsight I had bought this. I wish to order it through one of those firms who can supply CDs or videos which have been deleted. Is this something you or the readers of STARBURST can assist with? Yours Faithfully,

Ian Ellis, Isle of Man

We will keep our ears to the ground Ian, but I'm afraid your best bet involves the PC. We've only found a ropey version of THE SNOW QUEEN on YouTube. We'll keep hunting and if anyone out there has a copy, let us know!

MORE ADVENTURES IN TIME AND BELGIUM

Thanks for publishing my letter in STARBURST #414! Great to be in the *TERMINATOR* issue (I was looking forward to that.

Perhaps I'll see the movie this week in avant-première). As it turns out, DOCTOR WHO does get broadcast in Belgium on a channel named Acht (eight), a digital channel. It's on each Saturday at 7.40pm. I found out a few days after I sent my e-mail so if you get feedback from other Belgian readers pointing out my mistake... they're right! However, it used to be on Belgian public television for years.

Yves Kapreles, via EMAIL

Shauna says: Well that's the Belgium trip cancelled... it's a shame really because I was looking forward to visiting the Jean-Claude Van Damme statue as well! Damme it!

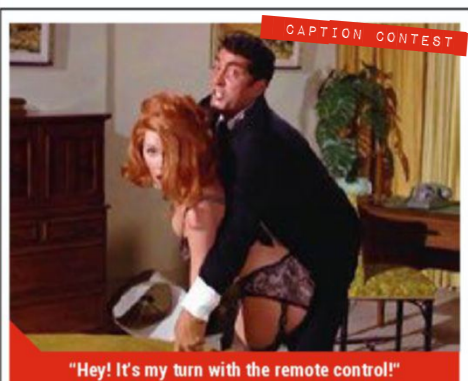


ACHT-ENTION!

I was very distressed to read that a fellow countryman and DOCTOR WHO fan was missing out on the wonders of our favourite show! IT'S SHOWN ON ACHT IN BELGIUM! If Yves didn't know about this, then he will be pleased to learn about a group I am a member of; Belgian Whovians United. Look it up online!

Lena, BELGIUM via EMAIL

Hopefully Yves will read about this and be able to join in! I assume it is a fan group, and not a football team? I guess they already have the scarves for it either way!



Winner: Andrew. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST NEXT ISSUE: 416 ON SALE FROM AUGUST 21ST

Sir
CHRISTOPHER LEE

by Ed Fortune

“To be a legend, you’ve either got to be dead or excessively old.”

– Sir Christopher Frank Carandini Lee, May 27th 1922 – June 7th 2015

Sir Christopher Frank Carandini Lee was one of the most well-known and iconic actors of the 20th and 21st centuries, recognised mostly for his roles as villains in some of the more popular movies of the modern age. His aquiline features and saturnine manner stalked across the silver screen for decades. He was able to run a chill down the bravest person's spine with a single raise of an eyebrow and was world famous for his powerful and memorable performances in almost 300 feature films.

Born in 1922, his mother was Countess Estelle Marie, a renowned Edwardian beauty whose lineage dated all the way back to Charlemagne. His father was Boer War hero Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Trollope Lee. Despite his parents separating when he was four, these two remarkable people filled his young life with various adventures. Before he was aged 10, he had met James Bond creator Ian Fleming (who became his step-cousin through his mother) and encountered Prince Yusupov and Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, the two men who assassinated Grigori Rasputin. As a boy, Lee had a keen interest in acting, and shared the stage of Summer Fields School with a young Patrick Macnee, who would grow to become a fine actor in his own right and passed away only weeks after Lee. He did not complete his education partially because his step-father went bankrupt, but also because World War II was about to begin.

Lee was keen to put himself somewhere he could do the most good and worked a number of support roles, including as a guard for the Finnish Army, a shipping clerk and a switchboard operator for Beecham's. By 1941, he had joined the RAF. Despite making it through training, a medical condition meant he could not fly and instead he worked in RAF Intelligence.

Speaking in an interview decades later, Lee said of this time "When people say to me, you know, were you in this? Were you in that? Did you work in this? Did you work in that? I always used to say 'Can you keep a secret?' And they would say 'Yes, yes' and I would say 'So can I'." We do know that he also worked for CROWCASS, the

organisation that hunted down Nazi war criminals. He retired from the RAF in 1946, with the rank of flight lieutenant.

It was a fateful meeting with his cousin Nicolò Carandini (then the Italian ambassador for Great Britain) that led him to consider acting as a career choice.

His entry into the profession was a rough one. He did not take well to stage acting and only really excelled at the fencing portion of curriculum whilst studying at the Rank Organisation's Company of Youth, aka the Charm School. Despite one producer memorably describing him as being "much too tall to be an actor", he spent roughly a decade learning the art through many forgettable walk on roles. It was through these small parts that he first encountered Peter Cushing, a man who would go on to become his co-star and lifelong friend. He found lucrative work with the British National Studios, playing a variety of action orientated characters. He made just shy of thirty films for the studio, honing his acting and oratory skills as he did so.

Despite all his hard work on his vocal talents, his big break came from a character who said nothing. In 1957, he played Frankenstein's Monster in the *The Curse of Frankenstein* for Hammer Film Productions. The movie also featured Peter Cushing as Frankenstein himself, and the two had an instant and obvious chemistry. They would go on to co-star in over twenty movies together. *The Curse of Frankenstein* outraged critics and moral guardians, but the general public flocked to the cinema.

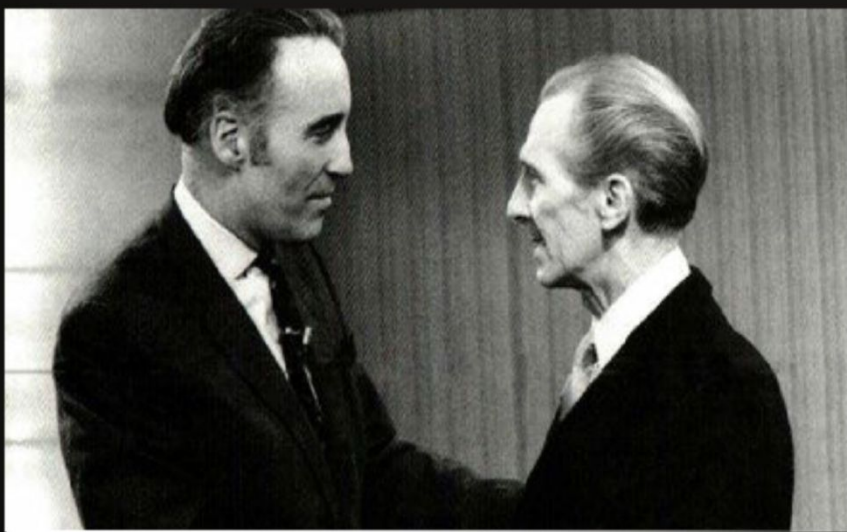
The two shot to stardom, and their notoriety would make them firm friends with other horror icons of the age, namely the writer Dennis Wheatley and the actor Boris Karloff. Hammer, being quite good at recognising a sure thing, cast Cushing and Lee in another horror movie, this time one that would exploit Lee's considerable skill with the spoken word. *Dracula* was an instant hit. Critics and the public adored it and Hammer would go on to produce many more Dracula movies. Lee stated many times that he was 'emotionally blackmailed' into making the later movies, with the Hammer producers reminding him



how many people's livelihoods depended on the productions. He would make a total of seven Dracula movies for Hammer, the last being *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* in 1973. He did star in many more features for Hammer, including *Rasputin*, *the Mad Monk* (of course, he played Rasputin) and as Sir Henry Baskerville in the classic *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which also starred Peter Cushing as Sherlock Holmes.

Lee was particularly proud of the Hammer feature *The Devil Rides Out*, based on the novel by Dennis Wheatley. The movie is considered a classic of its kind to this very day, and places Lee in the role of cult leader. The actor would turn in a similarly stellar performance as Lord Summerisle in *The Wicker Man*, produced by British Lion Films. Lee's trademark charm and natural authority lent an air of power and creepiness to the movie, and it too, is regarded as a classic by those in the know.

Concerned about being typecast as an actor for horror movies, he took a hand at being a producer. 1973's *Nothing But the Night* would be the only movie he produced, as he did not enjoy the process. He returned to acting, eschewing horror roles and employing his substantial





skill at fencing in the role of Comte de Rochefort in Richard Lester's *The Three Musketeers* and its sequel, *The Four Musketeers*. He would reprise the role in 1989's *The Return of the Musketeers*, even though the character had seemed to die in the last movie. Death, it seemed, was no object at the time.

Having narrowly missed the role of the titular *Dr No* in the 1969 Bond movie of the same name, Lee would eventually play the eccentric assassin Francisco Scaramanga in 1974's *The Man with the Golden Gun* and easily out-acted Roger Moore in every scene they appeared together. In 1977, Christopher Lee moved to the United States to pursue more diverse roles. Ironically, he ended up in more horror movies than anything else. The quality of the roles varied wildly; from the spooky children's favourite *Return from Witch Mountain* to the risible *Howling 2*. During this time, he would also appear in a movie that he described as his greatest ever role, that as founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the 1998 biopic, *Jinnah*. He said of it later "*The most important film I made, in terms of its subject and the great responsibility I had as an actor was a film I did about the founder of Pakistan, called Jinnah. It had the best reviews I've ever had in my entire career, as a film and as a performance. But ultimately it was never shown at the cinemas.*"

Lee has always worked in productions based upon novels, including adaptations of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. He was natural choice for the role of Saruman in Peter Jackson's 2001 version of *The Lord of The Rings* and he would reprise that role when Jackson returned to make *The Hobbit* into a very long trilogy. Jackson tells the story that during the filming of his death scene in *The Return of the King*, Lee refused coaching as to how to react when Saruman was stabbed in the back. Lee stated he knew what sound a man makes when stabbed.

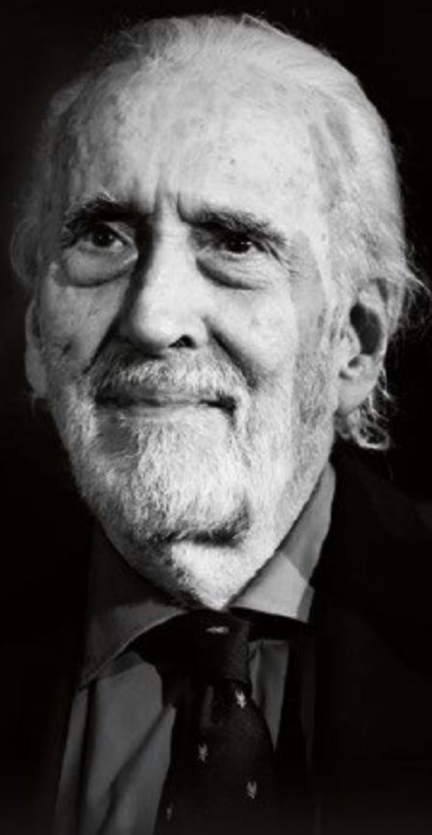
His work as Saruman attracted the attention of George Lucas, who required a stately and powerful figure for the character

of Count Dooku in the *Star Wars* prequels. Lee would do much of the fencing work in that role himself and defined a particular lightsaber fighting style for the franchise. He would also lend his considerable vocal talents to the spin-off animated show, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. This in turn lead to a variety of voice work roles for animated feature films such as *The Corpse Bride* and he would also lend his skill to video games like *Deus Ex Machina 2* and to the voice of Death in various adaptations of the works of Terry Pratchett.

He was knighted in 2009 for services to drama and charity. In 2010, won the Spirit of Metal award for his symphonic heavy metal album, *Charlemagne: By the Sword and the Cross*. A BAFTA Academy Fellowship was bestowed on him in 2011.

He passed away at 8:30am on Sunday June 7th 2015, following respiratory problems. He was 93. The actor's wife of 50 years, the Lady Lee, delayed the announcement to the public in order to inform close family members.

Goodbye and Thank You, Sir Christopher Lee. You had a full and fascinating life, and our world was enriched with you in it. You will be sorely missed.



1922 - 2015

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS

THINGS TO COME



TOM HOLLAND

MARVEL

So you have two superpowers in Sony Pictures and Marvel Studios working together on one of the most iconic characters in all comic books. What could possibly go wrong? Well, the two parties have spent a large part of the last month in disagreement over who to cast as the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Spider-Man. The Wallcrawler himself will debut in the Russo Brothers' **Captain America: Civil War**, which is already shooting, and so a decision was needed ASAP. Thing is, Sony wanted **The Impossible's** Tom Holland to play Peter Parker, whilst Marvel wanted **Red Band Society's** Charlie Rowe. Either way, we now have a new Spidey... and donning the legendary red and blue duds will be Tom Holland. The young Briton has landed the Spider-Man gig and will appear in a small role in next May's **Civil War** before then spinning off to his own July 2017 solo movie. As for that solo film, it's believed that this will be the first of a new trilogy of Spider-Man movies, tentatively dubbed **Spectacular Spider-Man**. Whereas the MCU has now found its Spidey, the first solo movie for Webhead has also found itself a director in the shape of **Cop Car's** Jon Watts. Here's hoping that under the umbrella of the MCU, Marvel's most famous of characters can get some cinematic treatment worthy of his legend. Or, y'know, they could just go the route of making something like the death of Gwen Stacy, one of the most pivotal and important moments in Peter Parker's life, essentially worthless again. Fingers crossed that's not the case from here on out.

Whilst on the topic of heroes debuting in the MCU, the upcoming **Black Panther** is still in search of a director. One name who was in the frame was **Selma's** Ava DuVernay, although she has now ruled herself out of helming T'Challa's tale. The director admitted to having talks with Marvel Studios but ultimately decided against taking on the film because both parties "didn't see eye to eye" on the direction of the story. On the flip side of that, Marvel's Kevin Feige has gone on record to say that several directors have had talks to helm **Black Panther**, so we could very well get an announcement on that front shortly. T'Challa himself will make his MCU debut, much like Spider-Man, in next May's **Captain America: Civil War**. The character will then headline his own July 2018 movie.

Moving things over to yet another debuting MCU character, the Benedict Cumberbatch-starring (because he's in *everything*...) **Doctor Strange** has found its Baron Mordo. Chiwetel Ejiofor, best known for his Oscar-nommed turn in **12 Years a Slave**, has landed the gig of the

film's big bad, who dastardly betrayed Strange's mentor, The Ancient One, and then took the age-old dark side path of black magic and demon-summoning. To be directed by **Sinister's** Scott Derrickson, **Doctor Strange** is set for a November 4th, 2016 release.

Yes we've got all of these new characters making their presence known in Marvel's Phase Three of movies (which is to be made up of a whopping ten movies), but there's still some news on old favourites. The next outing for the Thunder God, **Thor: Ragnarok**, is still on the hunt for a director. **Thor** director Kenneth Branagh was rumoured to be being lined up for an Odinson return, although Marvel's Kevin Feige has since moved to rule that out. Branagh did wonders with the first **Thor** movie, balancing the classic world and style of Thor with the modern world, but sadly it seems like a return for the actor-turned-director is now out of the question for **Ragnarok**. Alan Taylor, of course, took over the reins for **Thor: The Dark World**, but that was a film that underwhelmed many, meaning it's unlikely that he'll be returning for this third **Thor** flick. Whoever does end up helming what promises to be a gargantuan event for the God of Thunder, **Thor: Ragnarok** is currently set to hit screens on November 3rd, 2017.

Taking a well-timed trip over to another Marvel timeline, as in 20th Century Fox's **X-Men** world, the Channing Tatum-starring **Gambit** is reportedly close to finding itself a director. The main name in the frame at this stage is **Rise of the Planet of the Apes'** Rupert Wyatt, who is believed to be in advanced talks to helm the antics of Remy LeBeau, which is now confirmed to be an origin movie for the character and one that will exist as a standalone feature from the standard **X-Men** world at this stage. That said, some familiar X-faces will make appearances in the film and it will look to tie into the X-world moving forward. Focusing on the uber-cool kinetic energy-manipulating Cajun, **Gambit** is currently set for an October 7th, 2016 release.

Switching things over to the small screen, and in news nearly arguably even more impressive than 'Tom Holland is Spider-Man' is the news that **The Walking Dead's** Jon Bernthal has been cast as The Punisher for Season Two of the Netflix-exclusive **Daredevil**. The season-long arc of the Guardian Devil show will focus on a mouth-watering Daredevil vs. Punisher story, but that's not to say that more standard villains won't be present too. Briefly teased in the first season, long-standing DD foe Bullseye will also be appearing. In some interesting news, Jason Statham was in talks to play Bullseye, often depicted as the very best assassin and marksman in the Marvel comic book realm. Those talks fell through, largely down to the cat getting out of the bag earlier than all parties wanted, and so the search is still on for Bullseye. Another who will be making an appearance, and another who was also referenced in Season One of **Daredevil**, is Elektra. As well as being one of many of Matt Murdock's 'one trues', Elektra herself is another often deemed the best assassin in the Marvel realm. In terms of the comic books, Elektra was famously killed by Bullseye, and so the inclusion of both characters obviously has fans pondering whether something similar occurs when the show returns. And then there's the murky possibilities of Karen Page's backstory... Plus there's recent news that **Boardwalk Empire's** brilliant Vincent Piazza, who played Lucky Luciano in the hugely acclaimed HBO show, is being lined up for a mystery role in Season Two of **Daredevil**. At this stage, speculation suggests Piazza as a mob boss-type, although there are a few rumours that claim he could just well be in the frame to play Bullseye. **Daredevil** returns to Netflix next year.

Whilst Charlie Cox has done wonders as Matt Murdock in **Daredevil**, Krysten Ritter is starring in **Jessica Jones** (now no longer known as **A.K.A. Jessica Jones**) and Mike Colter is headlining **Luke Cage**, the one Marvel/Netflix show that's a



little quiet is **Iron Fist**. At the last word, Ryan Phillippe was rumoured to be taking on the titular Danny Rand/Iron Fist gig, but new stories suggest that there are a few complications with how to move forward with **Iron Fist**. The main issues seems to revolve around how to approach Danny Rand's powers. With one of Rand's powers being the ability to channel the magical power of the 'Iron Fist', it's said that the current debate is whether to keep Iron Fist's powers as mystical and magical or whether to look for a more grounded approach to his abilities. Either way, the show is still happening, there's nothing to fear on that front, but there are just a few things to iron out with **Iron Fist** right now.

In some final Marvel news, UK fans can rejoice as **Agent Carter** has finally been given a UK home! About time, right? Despite debuting in the US at the turn of the year, **Agent Carter** was bizarrely not picked up by any UK broadcasters. That has all changed, with FOX UK having secured the UK rights for the Hayley Atwell-starring series, which focuses on Peggy Carter in the aftermath of Steve Rogers' death, as she struggles to make it in a male-dominated world. **Agent Carter** will make its UK bow this month, although the actual air date is unknown as we go to print, meaning you may well have seen the show by the time you're reading this – in which case, it's pretty darn good, isn't it?! Meanwhile, whilst we're happy to just be getting Season One of **Agent Carter** on these shores, ABC have confirmed that the ten-episode second season of the show will debut in the US early next year. AP

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE

Well, it seems like STARBURST scooped the world, as we announced the full title of the new **Independence Day** movie a week before the official reveal.

Director Roland Emmerich said, "We always knew they were coming back. After **Independence Day** redefined the event movie genre, the next epic chapter delivers global spectacle of an unimaginable scale. Using recovered alien technology, the nations of Earth have collaborated on an immense defence program to protect the planet. But nothing can prepare us for the aliens' advanced and unprecedented force. Only the ingenuity of a few brave men and women can bring our world back from the brink of extinction."

Filming has just begun and the cast is currently made up of Liam Hemsworth, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman, Vivica A. Fox, Judd Hirsch, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Jessie Usher, Sela Ward, Brent Spiner and Maika Monroe. **Independence Day Resurgence** is set for a June 24th, 2016 release. AP

KONG: SKULL ISLAND

The latest venture in the **King Kong** mythos has taken a hit, with the news that J. K. Simmons and Michael Keaton have both dropped out of **Kong: Skull Island**, the reasoning being down to scheduling conflicts. The initial plan was for production on the film to start next month but that's now been delayed, which is why the duo have had to drop out.

Despite Simmons and Keaton now having left the project, Tom Hiddleston, better known as Loki to fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, is still attached to star. **The Kings of Summer**'s Jordan Vogt-Roberts is also on board to direct.

Plot-wise, all that is known about **Skull Island** is that it will centre on the titular island home of Kong and the creatures that inhabit it. At this stage, **Kong: Skull Island** is set for a March 10th, 2017 release. AP

MOOSE JAWS

Kevin Smith has hinted that the third film in his True North Trilogy, which began with **Tusk** and continues with the upcoming **Yoga Hosers**, may well contain a couple of old friends.

It seems **Moose Jaws**, the film in question, could feature at least a cameo from Jay and Silent Bob (Jason Mewes and Smith, respectively). Although not set in stone as yet, the director took to Facebook to ask his dedicated following if including the hapless stoners was a good idea. At the time of writing, almost 15,000 people had 'liked' the post, with thousands more commenting. Since that's probably twice as many people as actually bothered seeing **Tusk**, we guess that's a goer, eh Kev? **Yoga Hosers** has yet to have a release date, while **Moose Jaws** begins shooting in February 2016.



DC

With a whole host of heroes and villains already cast in the DC Cinematic Universe, it looks as if Warner Brothers is getting close to announcing who'll be playing their Green Lantern. In fact, it looks as if the DCCU will actually feature two Green Lanterns. Previous rumours suggested that **Star Trek**'s Chris Pine was in talks to play Steve Trevor, Diana's love interest in the Gal Gadot-starring **Wonder Woman**. Seemingly just a ruse all along, it now appears that Pine's negotiations with Warners have actually been for the role of Hal Jordan. In addition to Hal, it seems as if the **Fast & Furious** franchise's Tyrese Gibson is being lined up to play the John Stewart Green Lantern. At the last count, the **Green Lantern** movie is set for a 2020 release, although Zack Snyder's two-part **Justice League** is expected to feature at least one Lantern. Interestingly, this month's San Diego Comic-Con was expected to see Warners assemble their entire Justice League roster, including Green Lantern, so you may very well have seen some official Green Lantern casting by the time you're reading this.

Another person expected to be at Comic-Con is Ben Affleck, soon to be seen playing the Dark Knight in next year's **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**. With a new Caped Crusader movie a no-brainer, the talk this month is that Affleck will actually star in and direct the World's Greatest Detective's next solo movie, currently rumoured to be titled simply **The Batman**. That film has still to be officially confirmed by Warner Brothers, but the current story is that Affleck's Bats will fly solo in a November 2018 release. If that does indeed come to be, that means that we'll get five 'Affleck as Batman' appearances in four years, with Bat Affleck appearing in **Batman v Superman**, **Suicide Squad**, **The**

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN



Our first official glimpse of James McAvoy and Daniel Radcliffe as, respectively, the titular doctor and his assistant Igor doesn't particularly reveal much, but the new spin on the familiar tale will see the story retold through Igor's perspective, and the relationship between the two promising to be more than just master and servant. We have a hunch this may be something to seek out when it hits screens on November 25th.

Batman and the two-part **Justice League** (the first part of which is released in 2017, the second of which is set for 2019).

One DC-based movie that is looking increasingly unlikely to ever get made is the 'stranded in development hell' **Justice League Dark**. The always-fantastic Guillermo del Toro has been tinkering away on the project for years now, generally with very little reward, and this last month has brought the news that del Toro is now no longer attached to the project. With him currently working on **Crimson Peak** and then moving on to do a **Pacific Rim** sequel, it seems as if **Justice League Dark** was one too many plates for the writer/director to keep spinning. Focusing on the grimmer, supernatural side of the DC world, the **Justice League Dark** team is generally made up of the likes of John Constantine, Deadman, Swamp Thing, Spectre and Zatanna. The project itself is still not officially dead, but del Toro now no longer being attached, obviously throws up major questions.

Now, whilst the chance of a big screen John Constantine appearance is in the balance (we're not really counting that Keanu Reeves twaddle), the character's small screen fate has finally been sealed. The Matt Ryan-starring **Constantine** show had previously been axed by NBC due to poor ratings, but the hope of all involved was to find another home for the series. Sadly, the show has had to admit defeat in its search for a new place to lay its cigs and whiskey, with executive producer Daniel Cerone taking to social media to break the sad news that, yes, **Constantine** is officially as dead as one of Hellblazer's cigarette butts. R.I.P. **Constantine**, it's been fun.

Whilst John Constantine may have taken his last televisual breath, one show on the ever-nearing horizon is **DC's Legends of Tomorrow**, set in the same world as both **Arrow** and **The Flash**. This month has seen the show land itself a showrunner in the form of Phil Klemmer, best known for the likes of **The Tomorrow People** and **Chuck**. More importantly he's worked regularly with Greg Berlanti, one of the minds behind **Arrow**, **The Flash** and the aforementioned **Legends of Tomorrow**. This new show will see a



ragtag group having to travel through time to fight the immortal threat of Vandal Savage. Making up the team are Brandon Routh's Atom, Victor Garber's Martin Stein, Caity Lotz's White Canary (yep, Sara Lance is back from the dead *again*), Wentworth Miller's Captain Cold, Dominic Purcell's Heat Wave, Ciara Renee's Hawkgirl, Franz Drameh's Jay Jackson (believed to be the show's take on either Cyborg, Black Lightning or Static Shock) and Arthur Darvill's Rip Hunter. **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** is due to debut in the second half of the year.

As well as that, details have now been revealed as to when **The Flash** and **Arrow** will be returning to screens. The CW has announced that Grant Gustin's Barry Allen will return to US screens when **The Flash** Season Two arrives on October 6th. As for **Arrow**, Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen-centric show will debut its fourth season on October 7th. UK returns are at this point unannounced, although we tend to get the shows just a week or two after our US cousins.

In additional 'CW DC Universe' chatter, there've been various rumours this month that Ciara Renee's Hawkgirl is already being lined up for her own series. Folks at The CW quickly moved to downplay these stories, although you'd have to think that if **Legends of Tomorrow** proves a success then Hawkgirl could very well get a series. In fact, the character herself has already made a blink-and-you'll-miss-it appearance in **The Flash**'s Season One finale. For now though, this is all just ifs and maybes. AP

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

JULY 23rd - BASKET CASE (1982)

Frank Henenlotter's classic is the perfect blend of humour and splatter. Long cut in the UK, the version that screens now is completely uncensored. Who else feels sorry for little Belial?

+++

JULY 30th - DON'T LET HIM IN (2011)

A fabulously inventive low-budget debut from Kelly Smith, in which a serial killer may well have gone on holiday with a group of friends.

+++

AUGUST 1st - GRIZZLY (1976)

One of the first films to capitalise on the success of **Jaws**, and directed by William Girdler (see **Horror Obscura #405**), this eco-horror pits a giant bear against the hapless hunters.

+++

AUGUST 4th - EVIL ALIENS (2005)

British scream queen Emily Booth stars in this gore-soaked mix of sci-fi and horror from **Razor Blade Smile** director Jake West.

+++

AUGUST 10th - CHILLERAMA (2011)

Another coup for the channel, as this fun portmanteau still has no UK distribution. From gigantic sperm to a Nazi Frankenstein Monster, there's no barrier to taste here, but it's certainly a wild ride!

+++

There's still plenty more to enjoy, including fare for more delicate viewers such as Classic **Doctor Who** serials including this month, Tom Baker in **Horror of Fang Rock**, **The Robots of Death**, and **The Talons of Weng-Chiang**, Peter Davison in **Resurrection of the Daleks** and Sylvester McCoy in **The Greatest Show in the Galaxy**, among others. Also Linda Carter returns as Amazonian Diana Prince in Season Two of **New Adventures of Wonder Woman**.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

AND FINALLY...

The sequel to the classic 1980 sword-and-sorcery flick **Hawk the Slayer** is heading to Kickstarter to part-fund, after going into partnership with Rebellion, the games developers (who also own 2000 AD). Original director Terry Marcel is developing the film, with the progastic Rick Wakeman already on board to provide the score. More info will be forthcoming in future months, but it's great to see this finally moving ahead.

+++

Remember that Channing Tatum **Ghostbusters** film announced a few months back? Well, apparently that's not happening now. Originally being helmed by the Russo Brothers, it has seemingly been dropped as the anticipation for the Paul Feig all-female **Ghostbusters** mounts up. How this affects the proposed prequel, or the film with the combination of the Feig and Russo **Busters**, who knows? The ladies will be fighting ghosts from July 22nd 2016.

+++

Warner Bros are apparently enlisting Paul Thomas Anderson to rewrite and possibly direct their long-gestated live-action version of **Pinocchio**. With Robert Downey Jr set to play the puppet-making Geppetto and the wooden boy who wanted to be real, it certainly sounds an interesting prospect. No shooting dates or details are known as yet, though.

+++

The multi-billion dollar property known as **Hello Kitty** (who's actually not a cat, if you remember, surprisingly) is heading to the big screen as owners Sanrio Int. expand into the movies. The 40-year-old character has already been the subject of an animated TV series and the film is expected in 2019.

By John Townsend

U.N.C.L.E. REBORN

THE 47 YEARS LATER AFFAIR



Another month, another re-do of a classic property. Set within the same period as the original TV series, we look at whether **THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.** will help us carry on spying...

In 2002, *The Bourne Identity* changed once and for all the way spy films were perceived. For several years (the *Spy Kids* series aside), the genre was slowly becoming more and more contemplative and sober; more and more real if you will. Matt Damon's unsmiling memory-challenged super-agent confirmed Hollywood's growing belief that spying was, in fact, a serious business after all. Despite outperforming *The Bourne Identity* at the box office, *Die Another Day* proved to be the last of Pierce Brosnan's James Bond films as producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson decided to reinvent the franchise; opting for an emotional realism that would bring the character right up to date, but would signal the end of many of the more fantastical elements that had become increasingly prevalent in recent films.

So is spying really just not fun anymore?

There have always been parodies of spy films from *Top Secret!* to *True Lies*, *Austin Powers* to *Johnny English*, all of varying quality (we'll ignore *Knight and Day* as everyone else seemed to) but all having



"Guy Ritchie's The Man from U.N.C.L.E. will bear little resemblance to the source television show"



proposing the character Napoleon Solo, an American agent attached to this new international police force. After a favourable public response to a cameo appearance, Georgian (in the U.S.S.R.) agent Illya Kuryakin was added, and the series became a two-hander with the pair each week solving mysteries and fixing bad guys upon receiving their orders from the head of the organisation, Number One of Section One. With Robert Vaughn as Solo and David McCallum as Kuryakin, the show was hugely successful, with over 105 episodes in its 5-year run, and winning a Golden Globe in 1965.

U.N.C.L.E.'s main adversary at the time was T.H.R.U.S.H.; intent on taking over the world, the series never divulged the meaning of T.H.R.U.S.H. and when you discover a novelisation based upon the show records it as Terrestrial Hegemony for the Removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity, it's easy to understand why. Anyway, that's the background – now forget all of it, because apart from the name of the characters and the title, Guy Ritchie's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* will bear little resemblance to the source television show.

Technically, this new film will not be a remake, a reboot or a reimagining (anyone else bored with re-something or other?) of the original premise. The same 60's Cold War setting will remain and the characters, although possibly a little more polished and pretty now, appear to be generally

one thing in common: humour. Many of these films are outright comedies, but what about a film that combines the best of both espionage worlds; a throwback to the Bond films of the 70's and 80's with a pinch of Harry Palmer thrown in? Films that were as visceral as their more serious counterparts but with the wit and confidence to get away with a preposterous pun or punchline. 2015 could be the year that those films return. Already we have had *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, where gentleman spies repeatedly save the world through the use of good manners and deadly umbrellas. Marshalled by maverick producer and director Matthew Vaughn, *Kingsman* contains the unrestrained brutality of one of his previous films, *Kick-Ass*, while delivering killer lines with such abundant style that would cause Roger Moore to raise both eyebrows. Now there is another film set to invade the ground vacated by Bond, promising to join Vaughn's superb *Kingsman* as one of the year's biggest hits.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. is released this August, and there are many reasons to be optimistic about Guy Ritchie's Cold War comedy thriller. But first, a little background.

In the early 1960's, British producer Norman Felton approached James Bond creator Ian Fleming to collaborate on a television series after having an initial idea based around U.N.C.L.E. (United Network Command for Law and Enforcement). Fleming would later pull out due to other commitments but is credited with





unchanged. Instead of T.H.R.U.S.H. (you can understand why they dropped this... no one likes T.H.R.U.S.H.), the bad guys are former Nazis who fled Germany at the end of the war and are now in the process of establishing a worldwide criminal network. Origin stories will always be popular and here things are no different, with Solo and Kuryakin naturally disliking each other in the beginning only to discover how well they work together, and therefore U.N.C.L.E. will be born. A re-invention it is then...

The reasons to be optimistic stem primarily from the cast and crew that Ritchie has assembled in order to tell his spy story. Firstly, there are the leads: Henry Cavill is Solo and Armie Hammer plays Kuryakin. While it would be fair to say that Cavill has a little to prove in the lightness-of-touch stakes given that the majority of his roles, including a rather troubled God-like alien, have required a certain amount of intensity, Hammer has already proven more than capable of delivering comedic lines with aplomb in *The Social Network* and the under-appreciated *The Lone Ranger*. If Ritchie can draw the same on-screen chemistry he did in the *Sherlock Holmes* films, then if nothing else this will be an entertaining double act. With Alicia Vikander on board, already the star of what is possibly 2015's best film so far, *Ex Machina*, and some heavyweight Britishness in the form of Hugh Grant and Jared Harris, U.N.C.L.E. has without doubt a balanced and interesting ensemble cast.

Another key strength of the film comes in the form of cinematographer John Mathieson. With experience behind the camera on films such as *Gladiator*, *X-Men: First Class*, and *Great Expectations*, this is a man who knows how to shoot both the epic and the personal. He also was the uncredited director of photography on *Skyfall*'s opening sequence, so has a little recent spy experience to draw upon.

If nothing else then, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* will look good on screen with proven talent both in front of and behind the camera. So what of its director?

After almost a decade of constant disappointment since the beginning of the new millennium (putting it politely) that included the dire *Swept Away* and the smugly incomprehensible *Revolver*, Ritchie suddenly rediscovered his talent with the release of *Sherlock Holmes* in 2009. Successfully providing a new perspective on a character everyone has knowledge of was no mean feat, and it took real bravado and confidence to release a steampunk-inspired vision of the famous Victorian detective. With a new version of the King Arthur legend on the horizon, it does appear that period productions are the way forward for Mr Ritchie; best avoid those cockney gangsters altogether.

Perhaps the real reason the film could be successful, though, will come from that lack of connection with the original



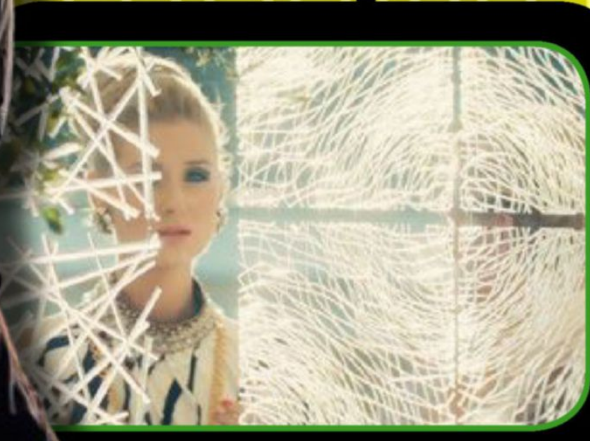
"Instead of T.H.R.U.S.H. (you can understand why they dropped this... no one likes T.H.R.U.S.H.), the bad guys are former Nazis"



television series. In carefully filtering out the best, most appropriate elements of the premise and then adapting that concept to fit with modern audiences, Ritchie and his writing team have removed an area of potential criticism and opened up the market considerably. With nearly 50 years having passed since the television show ended, only those with excellent memories or with a penchant for all things 'Swinging Sixties' will have any relationship with the original. Where Bond, Sherlock, The Lone Ranger and countless other characters and shows retain an affection that remains undiminished by time and benefits from numerous retellings (there's that re- again!) *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* simply doesn't. Stop anyone in the street and ask them to describe it (research tested for the purposes of this article) and the majority will offer little in the way of insight, perhaps save the names of the characters. For most audiences, this will be an entirely new film altogether.

So there is great hope and optimism that Ritchie will do the same for the 60's espionage thriller that he did for the quintessential Victorian sleuth. If we're lucky, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* will repeat the success of *Kingsman* and prove once again that there is still fun to be found in the spy genre.

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. is in UK cinemas from August 14th.





The
Lieutenant



The
MAGNIFICENT
SEVEN



The
MAN From
U.N.C.L.E.

STARBURST looks back at the distinguished careers of two powerhouse actors, who brought U.N.C.L.E. to life back in the sixties...

Bob's
your
uncle



The Man From Uncle's Robert Vaughn

By Dominic Cuthbert

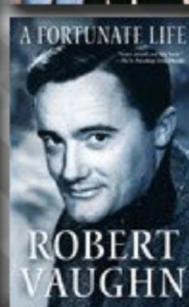
With the roaring success of Matthew Vaughn's *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, the upcoming feature thriller remake *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and the fervour building up around *SPECTRE*, spies are once again hot property. But long before Henry Cavill and Armie Hammer were sucking air, genre legend Robert Vaughn took centre stage alongside David McCallum in the sixties series *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* Still, that's far from the whole story. Stretching back as far as the mid-fifties, Vaughn's prolific career has had ups and downs, but there's been one constant. Vaughn's tremendous presence, warmth and extraordinary talent.

Born to acting parents in New York, and quickly embodying the cool, hip attitude of the sprawling city, Vaughn got his start reading Journalism at Minnesota University. Quitting after only a year, he moved to LA with his mother, where he got his MA in theatre. His hunger for education continued right through his acting career, even earning his PhD in 1970. But it was TV that he really stuck himself into. His debut effort was on the popular medical procedural drama *Medic* in 1955. Vaughn proved to be one of many actors given a career leg up by appearing on the show; it even marked an early principal role for the late Dennis Hopper.

Over the course of the next year, Vaughn made a string of TV appearances in a variety of dramas, including *Lux Video Theatre*, historical re-enactments in *You Are There*, the noir-tinged *Big Town*, the long-running *As the World Turns*, and sitcom *Father Knows Best*, among others. Already he was demonstrating his tremendous range, which would come to typify his filmography in the decades to come, and the ease with which he could sink into almost any role, whatever the genre or requirements. In amongst this slew of sporadic TV appearances, 1956 marked his first film role in *The Ten Commandments*. Though uncredited (he played 'Hebrew at Golden Calf') in the epic, it was a sign of things to come.

His first screen-credited film role came from the mediocre western *Hell's Crossroads* the following year, where he played Bob Ford, the infamous killer of the outlaw Jesse James. David Lowell Rich's 1957 *Rebel Without a Cause* knock off, *No Time To Be Young* (AKA *Teenage Delinquents*) gave Vaughn top billing, even going so far as to emblazon his name on the trailer as 'Introducing

THE MEN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



Robert Vaughn'. No one seemed to mind the inaccuracy. Though it failed to make much of an impression, it did showcase Vaughn giving a slinky performance as Buddy Root, the troubled teen at the heart of the moral panic melodrama.

He followed this up with more TV appearances and starring roles in middling dramas and westerns like *Unwed Mother*, *Teenage Cave Man* and *Good Day For a Hanging*. It wasn't until 1959, following a stint in the army where he rose to drill sergeant, that Vaughn got his first role of any real note. He was Academy Award and Golden Globe nominated for best supporting actor as Chester A. Gwynn in Vincent Sherman's *The Young Philadelphians*.

Next up was the western do-over of Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece, *Seven Samurai*. Vaughn is the only surviving actor of *The Magnificent Seven*, and he manages to leave such an impression acting alongside Steve McQueen and Charles Bronson, which is commendable. He starred in the television remake, which ran from 1998 to 2000, though there he took up the mantle of Judge Oren Travis. The less said about Vaughn's role as American Bob in the 2013 film that modernised the classic, the better. It looks unlikely, however, that he'll have any role in the upcoming remake starring Chris Pratt.

Following his stint in *The Magnificent Seven*, and many more TV and minor film appearances besides, Vaughn starred as Captain Raymond Rambridge opposite Gary Lockwood in Gene Roddenberry's pre-*Star Trek* outing *The Lieutenant* (it even sported a few future *Trek* stars in guest roles, including Majel Barrett, Leonard Nimoy and Nichelle Nichols). While Vaughn only ever averaged one scene per episode in the sixteen he was credited in, he received the same compensation as his co-star Lockwood. Hungry for more screen time, he approached

MGM Television and Norman Felton, whose production company was putting up the series. The result was a series of his own, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* A little audacity goes a long way. Vaughn had finally become a household name, known as far afield as Eastern Europe. Eleven years into his career and with around 75 unique acting credits to his name, his hard graft had paid off.

The series starred Vaughn as Napoleon Solo and David McCallum as Illya Kuryakin, secret agents for the clandestine international espionage and law-enforcement agency United Network Command for Law and Enforcement (U.N.C.L.E.). While they fought against a variety of wrongdoers, it came mostly in the guise of the nefarious T.H.R.U.S.H. organisation. It had a fine pedigree, with James Bond creator Ian Fleming contributing ideas after being approached by the show's co-creator Norman Felton. This culminated in the characters Napoleon Solo and April Dancer (who enjoyed the spin-off series creatively titled *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*). Harlan Ellison, who wrote arguably the greatest episode of *Star Trek*, also regularly contributed scripts to the series. Back on the subject of *Trek*, U.N.C.L.E. boasted guest appearances from Leonard Nimoy, William Shatner and James Doohan before they boldly went. It received plenty of acclaim and accolades, with Vaughn bagging himself several Golden Globe nominations. The show finished airing in 1968 after an impressive 105-episode run, but it had a life outside of TV with merchandise, comic books and a novelisation. With its blend of cool gadgets, sharp wit and stellar acting, U.N.C.L.E. remains a television staple. It was resurrected with the original cast in 1983 for the TV movie *The Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Fifteen Years Later Affair*.

Vaughn was BAFTA nominated as supporting actor for his turn as the

politician Walter Chambers in the adrenaline-pumping Steve McQueen vehicle *Bullitt*. He continued to act in a variety of film and TV roles, balancing B-movies with those of bigger budgets, including *Superman III* and *The Towering Inferno*. He appeared in the fifth and final series of *The A-Team* as General Hunt Stockwell, and as Colonel Masters in schlocky zombie sequel *C.H.U.D. II - Bud the Chud*. But drama and TV movies were his stock-in-trade by the eighties.

Throughout the nineties, Vaughn continued his repertoire of minor movies and appeared in some of the most popular shows of the time, including *Murder, She Wrote*; *Walker, Texas Ranger*; *Diagnosis Murder* and *Law and Order*. The noughties saw him making a splash on UK screens, starring in BBC One's quirky con artist drama *Hustle*, where he played a wizened paternal figure alongside Marc Warren, Jaime Murray and Robert Glenister. He even appeared in 13 episodes of *Coronation Street* in 2012, as a love interest for Stephanie Cole's character Sylvia Goodwin.

And that's just his screen work. Never mind his radio appearances, published books, stage work and more that'd need its own book to fill (*Robert Vaughn: A Fortunate Life: An Autobiography*, if you're interested). Over the course of his illustrious, if at times rocky, career, Vaughn has dabbled in just about every genre, from the western to horror to melodrama to sitcom. He's helped to define the spy genre, proving a far better agent than a certain Martini-sipping Brit. While not as prolific as he used to be, his astute brand of cool still peppers all his performances, and the upcoming *Gold Star* looks set to showcase some of his best work to date. He's a genre veteran, and if he's not one of your favourite actors, well, you've not been paying attention.

THE MEN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



The OUTER LIMITS



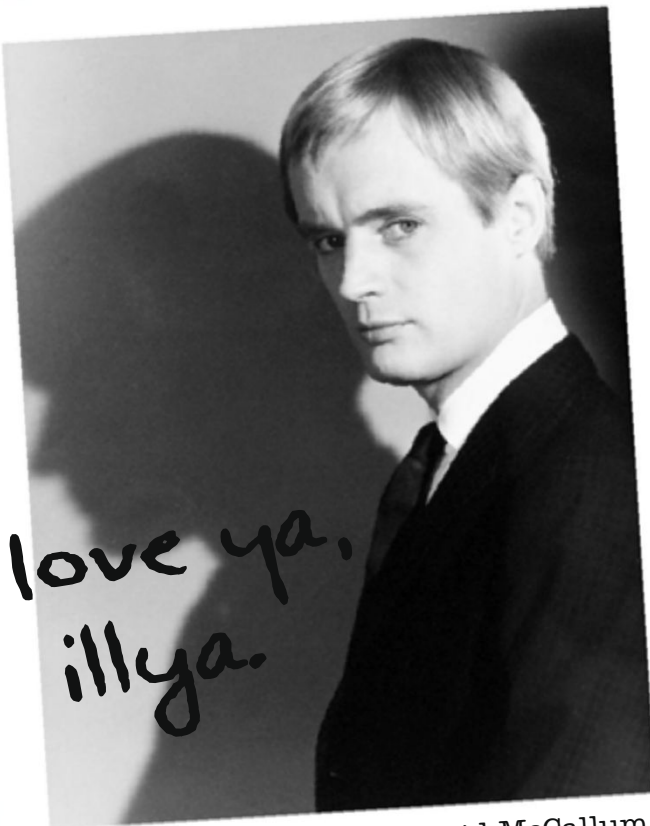
The GREAT ESCAPE



COLDITZ

The
MAN From
U.N.C.L.E.

FRANKENSTEIN: The TRUE STORY



The Man From Uncle's David McCallum

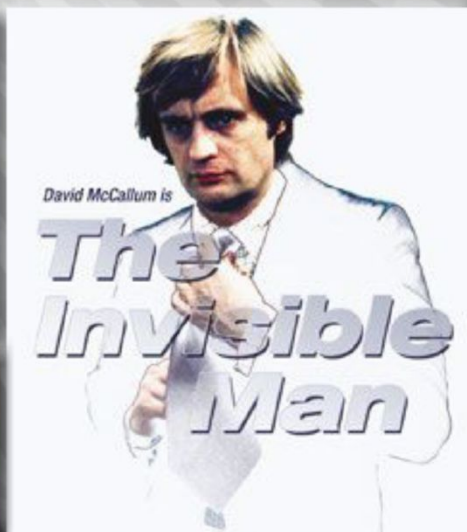
By Jon Towlson

Renowned for his role as Illya Kuryakin (although younger readers will probably recognise him more as Ducky in *NCIS*), it's hard to imagine an actor more deserving of the epithet 'cult' than David McCallum. Quite apart from the immortal *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* TV series and movie spin-offs, McCallum has a roll call of absolutely classic film and TV cult and science fiction: from *The Great Escape* to *The Outer Limits*, from the TV series *The Invisible Man* to *Sapphire and Steel*, the list goes on and on. Indeed, there was a time in the '70s (as it is now) when McCallum never seemed to be off the TV, and his complete list of credits from the late '50s onwards is nothing less than awe-inspiring.

McCallum was born in Glasgow in 1933, the son of musicians. His first calling was playing the oboe (no sniggering at the back) and for a while it seemed that he would follow in the footsteps of his father, David Sr., as an orchestral leader, before the acting bug bit and David Jr. enrolled at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (little known is that McCallum actually did carry on a music career on the side, recording four albums of Jazz-inspired compositions in the 1970s. One of his tracks – *The Edge* – is instantly recognisable as a Dr Dre sample).

After drama school, McCallum was cast in a number of British crime thrillers, including some minor classics like *Hell Drivers*, starring Stanley Baker. McCallum's blonde good looks made him the ideal choice for playing charismatic, slightly enigmatic figures, such as the juvenile delinquent, Johnny, who holds a classroom hostage with a machine gun in *The Violent Playground*. A role in *The Great Escape* (as 'Dispersal', the one who figures out how to scatter the soil from the tunnels around the camp without the guards noticing) led to McCallum being cast opposite super-smooth Robert Vaughn in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* His decision to play Russian spy Illya Kuryakin as slightly mysterious may not have done much to thaw the East-West tensions of the time, nor dispel Russian stereotypes, but it did help turn McCallum into a major heart-throb and one of the most recognisable faces on television. McCallum likes to joke that every day since *U.N.C.L.E.* first aired

THE MEN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



in 1964, somebody has shouted out, "*Hey, Illya*" in passing. Kuryakin had started out as only a minor character in the pilot episode, but the audience's response had been so positive to McCallum that the show's creators decided to pair up Vaughn and McCallum and the rest is history. *U.N.C.L.E.* was cancelled in 1968 after audiences tuned out when it became too campy ("*You can't satirise a satire*," McCallum has said), but it earned McCallum Emmy and Golden Globe nominations and set his career on path for the next fifty years.

Before becoming an U.N.C.L.E. agent, he made a couple of episodes of *The Outer Limits*. In *The Sixth Finger*, McCallum played a Welsh miner who a rogue scientist advances twenty thousand years in terms of mankind's evolution, developing an overlarge cortex and a sixth finger on each hand as a result. The following year, in *The Forms of Things Unknown*, he plays a strange inventor of a time 'tilter' that resurrects the dead. It seemed that from this point, McCallum was to become especially associated with cult TV and telefantasy.

A starring role in classic prisoner-of-war TV drama *Colditz* cemented McCallum's fame in Britain. As Flight Lieutenant Simon Carter, McCallum's character was a hot-headed young prisoner, desperate to escape from the German POW Castle (he almost manages to do so hiding inside a tea chest). Still gripping in terms of its constant escape attempts, *Colditz* is well worth seeking out on DVD.

There is another fine McCallum performance in *Frankenstein: The True Story*, a made-for-television film from 1973, and one of the best *Frankenstein* adaptations ever. McCallum plays Dr Henry Clerval, Victor Frankenstein's mentor, who shows him how to create life using solar power before

himself succumbing to a heart attack. The film remains a poignant and intelligent version of Mary Shelley's classic.

Less successful maybe, but just as fun, was the short-lived NBC TV series from 1975, *The Invisible Man*, in which McCallum portrayed another scientist, this one called Daniel Westin, who discovers that his experiments in molecular disintegration have the unfortunate side effect of turning objects (and people) invisible. Naturally, he tries it himself, only to realise that the serum he developed to make himself visible again fails to work, so he's stuck being an invisible man.

As tends to be the case with '70s telefantasy, the pilot episode takes the premise seriously (Westin uses his invisibility in order to destroy the molecular machine he created to stop it falling into the hands of the Pentagon who want to use his research to create an invisible army), but the series itself is pure corn, replete with hokey invisibility 'gags'. Less than believable were the special mask and gloves that Westin wears to give him a normal appearance, supposedly made from a special material called Dermaplex that has 'the exact properties of human skin' (but when taken off, strangely enough, looks like the cheap rubber mask of David McCallum's face that it is). The show lasted only one season before NBC pulled it, replacing it with a reboot of the same premise, the only slightly less risible *The Gemini Man* in 1976, (*Alias Smith and Jones*' Ben Murphy took the McCallum role) which lasted only thirteen episodes as well. Viewers evidently saw through the whole invisibility thing.

Much better for McCallum (and viewers) was *Sapphire and Steel*, in which he played opposite Joanna Lumley (herself basking in cult stardom after her role as

Purdey in *The New Avengers*) as a pair of mysterious time-travelling elementals who investigate and guard the order of Time itself, whenever evil forces threaten to break its integrity. Running from 1979-1982 as an ITV production, *Sapphire and Steel* was surprisingly popular given its way out and eccentric premise and eerie atmosphere. Part of the success of the show can be attributed to the quality of the writing, which McCallum himself took a part in, working with the show's creator P.J. Hammond and producer Shaun O'Riordan to make the scripts more gripping and ghostly. Shame that *Sapphire and Steel* has never been repeated on terrestrial television. However, all 34 episodes have been released on DVD, by Network in the UK, and in the US, Shout Factory!

The '80s and '90s saw McCallum step back a bit, which still meant he appeared in more shows than your average actor, including episodes of *Hammer House of Mystery and Suspense*, *The A-Team*, *seaQuest* DSV, *Babylon 5*, and *Law and Order*. He also did his bit for British movies in the '90s, appearing in director Peter Chelsom's excellent 1991 debut *Hear My Song* and director Michael Winner's nowhere-near-excellent *Dirty Weekend* (1993).

Then, in 2003, he took the role of Donald 'Ducky' Mallard in a show called *JAG* (Judge Advocate General), and that spun off into another little TV series called *NCIS*, which became a phenomenon. McCallum was no longer hearing "*Hey, Illya*" from passers-by on the street. Instead they were shouting "*Hey, Ducky*"; plus ça change for one of the most prominent and well-respected character actors ever to appear in cult and science fiction television.

But for *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* fans, David McCallum will always remain our favourite Russian secret agent. Love Ya, Illya.



THE MEN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



OPEN CHANNEL D: THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. AFFAIR

BY ROBIN PIERCE

As the classic series is given a modern overhaul, we cast our minds back to the original and find out what made it so special...

Act I The Genesis Affair

The first time James Bond strode confidently from the right of the cinema screen, spun 90 degrees to face us and shot, it was a paradigm-altering moment in pop culture.

Gone was the film perception of a spy as a seedy, trench coat wearing individual, straddling the Iron Curtain, trading messages written in invisible ink as part of a duplicitous, deadly and often treacherous life in noir films. Bond showed us a new kind of spy – glamorous, with limitless resources, gadgetry, women and an expense account that knew no bounds as he travelled the world's most exotic locations tracking down megalomaniacs with aspirations of world domination. A new craze was born, a hugely profitable one as '60s spy-mania took hold.

As Bond was phenomenally successful at the box office, the television industry needed a response to make sure they profited on the public's sudden unquenchable thirst for fantasy espionage.

It was time to call in the Spymaster himself, Bond creator Ian Fleming.

Norman Felton was a producer at MGM, and was anxious to bring a Bond-like series to the small screen. He met with Fleming to brainstorm a concept. Not a great deal came from the meeting, except Fleming's idea for a spy named Napoleon Solo – simply because it sounded like a good name.

Production began on a weekly spy series called simply *Mr Solo* which would later be shortened to *Solo*.

Robert Vaughn was cast in the central role in the pilot film, which would be used to sell the series to the networks. Solo would report to his superior, Mr Allison, played by veteran actor Will Kuluva, and to reinforce the concept that the spy organisation they worked for was truly international and world-wide, British actor David McCallum was cast in a minor role as a Russian agent, Illya Nickovitch Kuryakin. (When McCallum asked for some background on his character, all he was told was "he has a stack of jazz records under his bed".)



“EON Productions protested claiming copyright infringement, and MGM had to change the title of their new spy series to *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*”

After screening the pilot, the network executives wanted some changes made before the series went into proper production, and in one of the great misunderstandings of sixties TV history, one of the changes that was demanded by an executive who was either vague or forgetful. The edict came down that they didn't like the guy whose last name began with a "K". It was assumed the casting of Will Kuluva was being objected to and his role was recast, bringing U.N.C.L.E. under new management - Alexander Waverly (Leo G. Carroll). It wasn't until the show was well into production that the same executive saw Kuryakin on screen and asked why he was still around. By the time the error was spotted, the Russian with the Beatle haircut had become a teen idol and rather than be a background character or sidekick, Kuryakin was getting as much screen time as Solo.

But there was one more change that needed to be made.

What Fleming had failed to mention to Norman Felton was that he had already used the last name of Solo for a gangster character in his Bond novel *Goldfinger*, and as the opening episode of Solo was due to premiere Stateside on September 22nd, 1964 and *Goldfinger* was due to be released in U.S. cinemas in December having already been released in the UK on September 18th, EON Productions protested claiming copyright infringement, and MGM had to change the title of their new spy series to *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

Incidentally, the pilot for the series has the distinction of existing in three different forms; as the original pilot under the name *Solo* which was filmed in colour, as the opening episode of the series proper titled *The Vulcan Affair*, with its running time reduced to the requisite 50 minutes, shown in black and white, and finally as a theatrical release outside the USA, re-edited with some additional scenes under the title *To Trap a Spy*.

Act II The So, What's It All About? Affair

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. series was like nothing else on TV at the time, and there were some conventions that were observed throughout its four-year run that make it stand out even further.

U.N.C.L.E. is an international spy organisation, encompassing every race, creed or culture. It is established as the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, not a shortening of Uncle Sam (i.e. the United States) as some believed. Its mission is to maintain legal and political order anywhere in the world. Their main headquarters is hidden behind the façade of a brownstone building in the East Forties in New York. The street outside the secret entrance is under constant surveillance through an ingenious periscope hidden in a fire hydrant.

The Agents' entrance is through Del Floria's - a tailor's shop (Though the series of novels

that tied-in with the show established that Mr Waverly had his own personal secret entrance). Proceeding to one of the cubicle changing rooms, the coat hook on the back wall is a switch which, when turned to the side, opens the secret panel to U.N.C.L.E.'s reception area, where you'll be greeted by a receptionist who'll pin your unique triangular insignia showing your number to your clothing. DO NOT attempt to place the badge yourself, the receptionist has a special chemical on her fingers to activate your badge. Unless it's activated, the alarms will sound and you'll be surrounded by armed agents within seconds.

Field agents can keep in touch with HQ with either a miniaturised radio transmitter cunningly concealed in a fake pack of cigarettes as seen in the first season, or by using the U.N.C.L.E. pens, which have a much smaller transmitter. Saying the phrase "*open channel D - overseas relay*" will put you in touch from any part of the globe.

Of course, field agents need to be well armed, and for this purpose, the distinctive U.N.C.L.E. special was issued. This is an adaptation of a German 1934 7.64mm Mauser which could be converted into a machine gun or a rifle with the addition of a silencer, an extended barrel, shoulder stock, telescopic sight and magazine. In later years, Han Solo's faithful blaster would be based upon the same pistol in the *Star Wars* trilogy.

If Bond had his Aston Martin, then Solo and Kuryakin also needed a stylish runabout.



“they would occasionally be seen in a sleek metallic blue custom car armed with flame throwers, laser beams, and machine guns. It even had missile launchers built-in to its gull wing doors. Beat THAT, Mr Bond”.



From the third season, they would occasionally be seen in a sleek metallic blue custom car armed with flame throwers, laser beams, and machine guns. It even had missile launchers built-in to its gull wing doors. Beat THAT, Mr Bond.

But all this tech needs a worthy opponent to use it against. We had already seen that U.N.C.L.E. was made up of all races from all countries, with a Russian in plain sight while the rest of the world worried about the Cold War. Who or what could fill that void?

While Bond battled SPECTRE, Solo and Kuryakin took on THRUSH,

Or, more accurately T.H.R.U.S.H. – the Technological Hierarchy for the removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity. (Just to clarify, the bad guys were named after the kleptomaniacal wild bird, NOT the other thing).

So, who, or what is THRUSH, and what is its aim? This was best explained by Solo in the opening episode.

“THRUSH might be a man, or a woman, or a committee that heads a secret international organisation. Very powerful and very wealthy. THRUSH has no allegiance to any country nor to any ideal. It'll embark on any undertaking it may decide is in its own interest. And where THRUSH succeeds, many, many people pay a terrible price.”

The THRUSH agents have a habit of carrying their own stylised weaponry – a rifle with a distinctive large infra-red light, which emits a trilling sound when activated. The foot soldiers are also dressed in paramilitary gear with the THRUSH symbol on their berets.

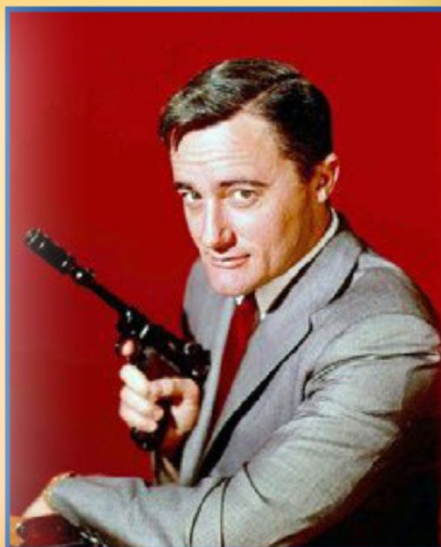
A typical U.N.C.L.E. episode would see Solo and Kuryakin dispatched to different locations, different continents, even, both working on the same

case, until joining forces in the episode's final act. Every week, the intrepid agents would have an 'innocent' with them on the case. This would be an ordinary, everyday, character who would somehow become involved with the assignment and go along for the adventure. They could be anybody from college students, ex-wives or girlfriends of THRUSH agents, a daughter whose parents had been kidnapped by THRUSH, or just someone who was in the wrong place at the wrong time and witnessed something they shouldn't.

Every episode title would end with the word 'Affair' and on returning from a commercial break, every 'act' would have its own title card, usually with a line of dialogue from that particular segment. At the close of every episode, a card would be shown at the end of the credits thanking The United Network for Command of Law and Enforcement for their co-operation in the making of the episode, which convinced many viewers that the fictitious organisation did indeed exist.

Act III The Prime Time Hit Affair

U.N.C.L.E. debuted with a stunning opening episode, quickly establishing the characters and the dangerous world in which they lived. *The Vulcan Affair* began with a strike force from THRUSH infiltrating U.N.C.L.E. headquarters on a suicide mission to assassinate Mr Waverly in order to prevent him from sending Solo on a mission to foil the assassination of an African premiere.



“NBC decided to fine-tune *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* to fit in with the audience’s new-found taste for the colourfully absurd”

Transmitted in black and white, these early episodes have a sense of mystery and intrigue about them, which would sadly be lost in the following seasons. THRUSH seemed to have no limits when it came to evil-doing. At various times in the opening season, they developed a fear gas (*The Quadripartite Affair*), a method of brainwashing (*The Green Opal Affair*), they would poison Mr Waverly (*The Brain-Killer Affair*) and develop a chemical capable of endowing super strength and reanimating the dead (*The Guns of Nazarene Affair*).

But one of the show’s greatest strengths was its guest stars. A young Kurt Russell played a ten-year-old boy in *The Finny Foot Affair*, while ex *Bride of Frankenstein* Elsa Lanchester was an evil scientist who tampered with Waverly’s brain after poisoning him in the aforementioned *Brain-Killer Affair*. Anne Francis and Jill Ireland appeared in two episodes each, but perhaps the biggest accidental coup was the first screen meeting of William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy in *The Project Strigas Affair*, a couple of years before both became major stars in *Star Trek*.

As the first season ended, both Vaughn and McCallum had an immense fan following and the studio’s publicity department was inundated by requests from fans for giveaways such as U.N.C.L.E. or THRUSH identity cards – you could literally choose which side you wanted to be on.

Some episodes were even edited together and released as feature films, increasing the profitability of the series even further (See the box out for further details.) It was a safe

bet that the second season would be bigger, better, brighter – and in full colour!

The second season started off with a two-part story, *The Alexander the Greater Affair*, in which Rip Torn (*Men in Black*) plays a megalomaniac who has taken his name a little too literally and plans to conquer the world. This two-parter was edited into a feature film, *One Spy Too Many* and released theatrically.

As the series progressed, our agents would be pitted against an increasing outlandish and colourful array of plots that seemed to be better suited to a comic book. There was a magician (Vincent Price) who has developed a mind reading device for THRUSH (*The Foxes and Hounds Affair*). Later in the season, THRUSH would have a gadget for activating dormant Japanese volcanoes (*The Cherry Blossom Affair*), U.N.C.L.E. would have to deal with a voodoo curse (*The Very Important Zombie Affair*) and a THRUSH strain of killer bees (*The Birds and the Bees Affair*). All of this was a far cry from the more seriously dramatic and urgent episodes of the first season.

There were high points such as *The Waverly Ring Affair*, where Solo and Kuryakin are on the trail of an elusive double agent, and *The Re-Collectors Affair*, involving a group of bounty hunters who track down ex-Nazis, kill them and recover their stolen art treasures, which they then sell back to the original owners. But for every straight episode, there was one in a comedic vein (pardon the pun) such as *The Bat Cave Affair*

which featured Count Zark (a pre-*Mission: Impossible* Martin Landau), a THRUSH agent who plans to jam the world’s radar systems with radioactive bats.

And speaking of bats and batcaves...

Act IV The Where Did It All Go Wrong? Affair

As NBC was midway through broadcasting U.N.C.L.E.’s second season in January 1966, the ABC Network premiered their new prime time show *Batman* and a whole new craze was born overnight, as Batmania swept the English-speaking world.

Batman was a show that had truly phenomenal success by being accessible to both adults and kids. Playing straight-laced characters in increasingly absurd and colourful situations became known as camp comedy and the producers of *Batman* knew that they could hook the kids with the action and the adults with the wry humour. A winner all around.

Eager to jump on any bandwagon that could increase viewing figures, the other networks sat up and took notice. Thus CBS decided to change direction with their successful sci-fi series *Lost in Space*, virtually turning it into a slapstick comedy with the loveable rascal ex-assassin Zachary Smith taking centre stage, rather than showing the adventures of a pioneering space family fighting for survival. Meanwhile, NBC decided to fine-tune *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* to fit in with

THE ADAM’S RIB AFFAIR • THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E.



In *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*’s second season episode *The Moonglow Affair*, Solo and Kuryakin are incapacitated by THRUSH to such a degree that Mr Waverly had to bring in additional agents to help out. Thus, April Dancer was introduced to the audience. Originally played by ex-Miss America May Ann Mobley, she was a young agent with an older, bitter and resentful ex-field agent named Mark Slate (Norman Fell) watching over her.

Ratings for the episode were high enough to justify a full series for the fall 1966 season with Stefanie Powers and Noel Harrison now in the starring roles, with heartthrob Harrison playing a younger, less gruff character than his predecessor.

The structure of this series was the same as its older sibling, using the same sets for the U.N.C.L.E. HQ, but crossovers were rare – however, *The Mother Muffin Affair* was a satisfying oddity, bringing Solo together with Dancer in a mission to escort a witness willing to testify against a criminal organisation back to the USA. However, Mother Muffin and her team of assassins try to stop them. Mother Muffin being Boris Karloff in drag.

The last episode transmitted in April 1967, entitled *The Kooky Spook Affair*.

U.N.C.L.E.’s bubble was bursting.



“Season Three never really recovered from the sight of Solo dancing with a gorilla in *The My Friend The Gorilla Affair*”

the audience's new-found taste for the colourfully absurd.

The results were a creative disaster, and ratings declined.

The third season began with two broadly similar episodes, pitting Solo against strong and powerful women. In *The Her Master's Voice Affair*, Solo has to investigate a girls' school where all the girls have been brainwashed and programmed to kill him if they hear a certain piece of music as the trigger. This was followed by *The Sort of Do-It-Yourself Dreadful Affair*, written by sci-fi icon Harlan Ellison in which Solo is nearly killed by a robot woman with enhanced strength.

Much of the rest of the season succumbed to the camp craze. The series saw THRUSH develop a hiccup gas (*The Pop Art Affair*), a tidal wave machine (*The Yo-Ho-Ho and a Bottle of Rum Affair*), and exploding apples (*The Apple a Day Affair*).

Every so often, an episode would appear to give hope that the good old days of the series could return. In *The Off-Broadway Affair*, the chase is on to find a THRUSH device that jams all U.N.C.L.E. communications, but then there would be something like *The Hot Number Affair*, which showcased the acting talents of popular chart toppers Sonny and Cher as a pair of clothes designers in a plot involving a THRUSH code hidden in a dress pattern.

Season Three never really recovered from the sight of Solo dancing with a gorilla in

The My Friend The Gorilla Affair.

The writing was on the wall. The camp craze died out as quickly as it had arrived, fuelled perhaps by too many series trying to emulate Batman's style and success. The public had become bored.

However, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* was renewed for a fourth season, and an earnest attempt was made to bring the series back to the spy action roots of its early years. The sets for the U.N.C.L.E. headquarters were updated, now featuring a control centre with an impressive wall of computers (from NASA, no less).

The scripts were strong; with THRUSH plots to assassinate Waverly (*The Summit-Five Affair*), *The Master's Touch Affair* seeing Solo at the mercy of a THRUSH leader who wants to defect before his rival has him assassinated, and Solo hunted like prey through a condemned area of New York in *The Deadly Quest Affair*, while Illya's life hangs in the balance. Ex-U.N.C.L.E. head Will Kuluva reappeared in the series, not as Waverly's predecessor, but as a Nazi with a thought-control device in *The Gurnius Affair*, and U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters came under bomb attack in *The Maze Affair*.

But it was too little, too late. The audience had left, the concept burned out. January 8th and 15th, 1968 saw the transmission of the last Affair, a two-parter called *The Seven Wonders of the World Affair*.

The series was unceremoniously cancelled in mid-season, and Channel D fell silent.



"1983 saw a reunion TV movie, *The Return of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. – The Fifteen Years Later Affair*"

THE LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES AFFAIR

Between 1964 and 1968, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* spawned an incredible seven films. All of which were either expanded versions of TV episodes padded with extra scenes, or two-part stories edited together.

To Trap a Spy (1964)

Originally the first show in the series, *The Vulcan Affair*, with some additional 'steamy' scenes. Will Kuluva appears as the pre-Waverly spymaster, Mr Allison. THRUSH are referred to as WASP.

The Spy With My Face (1965)

Season One's *The Double Affair*, with THRUSH creating an exact duplicate of Solo for their nefarious ends. We'll forgive the clumsily-inserted extra footage, just because the inevitable Solo vs. Solo fight is pretty good.

One Spy Too Many (1966)

Season Two's *The Alexander The Greater Affair* parts 1 and 2. Megalomaniacal industrialist Alexander wants to conquer the world to expand his financial empire, breaking each of the Ten Commandments on his way.

One of Our Spies is Missing (1966)

Season Two's *The Bridge of Lions Affair* parts 1 and 2. THRUSH have their own fountain of youth in a newly developed rejuvenation formula, and it's in the hands of the screen's original Dr Zaius, Maurice Evans. Watch out

for the Starfleet's favourite Chief Engineer – Canadian James Doohan without the Scottish accent that made him famous.

The Spy in the Green Hat (1967)

Season Three's *The Concrete Overcoat Affair* parts 1 and 2. THRUSH plan to divert the Gulf Stream (we don't think they thought this one through – surely the whole planet would be uninhabitable?), Illya is tortured by the unfortunately named Miss Diketon (Janet Leigh), Solo almost gets married, and Will Kuluva returns to the fold – as a THRUSH commander.

The Karate Killers (1967)

Season Three's *The Five Daughters Affair* parts 1 and 2. THRUSH are after a formula to extract gold from seawater (??? – don't ask) which has been distributed in five parts among the daughters of a scientist, whom THRUSH operative Herbert Lom had killed at the beginning of the film. The Karate Killers of the title are the THRUSH hit squad who follow Solo and Kuryakin across the globe on this mission.

The Helicopter Spies (1968)

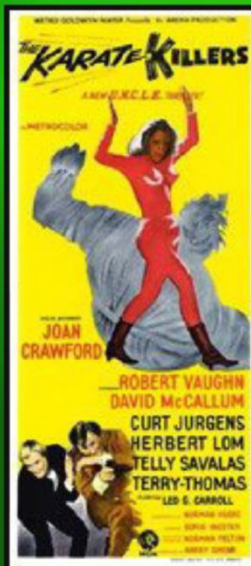
Season Four's *The Prince of Darkness Affair* parts 1 and 2. There's a deadly new weapon in the wrong hands. A heat ray which has wiped out an African tribal village. Solo and Kuryakin need the solar prism which powers the ray, but to get that they need to enlist the services of a safecracker who now heads a fanatical cult called The Third Hand. (It's never easy, is it?)

How To Steal The World (1968)

The last episodes to be transmitted – *The Seven Wonders of the World Affair* parts 1 and 2. Before becoming known as a comedy actor, Leslie Nielsen kidnapped seven scientists calling themselves rather egotistically The Seven Wonders who have invented a domesticity gas. He plans to use it for world peace. THRUSH, however, have other plans.

But Solo and Kuryakin's exploits weren't quite over. Though not released theatrically, 1983 saw a reunion TV movie, *The Return of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. – The Fifteen Years Later Affair*, which reunited the now-retired agents, bringing them back to active service to foil THRUSH's plan to become a nuclear power. Solo now owns a computer software company, Kuryakin is a fashion designer. Sadly, as Leo G. Carroll had passed away, the character of Mr Waverly was written out, opening the door for new U.N.C.L.E. chief, Sir John Raleigh (Patrick Macnee). The film's high point is a car chase through Vegas, where Solo is helped by a British agent called 'JB' played by George Lazenby, driving a gadget-laden Aston Martin DB5, while *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* is referenced in the dialogue.

Technically, this made 1983 the year all three Bonds to that point were back in action, as Roger Moore's *Octopussy* and Sean Connery's *Never Say Never Again* were also released.



By Paul Mount



PATRICK MACNEE

1922 - 2015

1 977. The Harbour Hotel in Toronto. British actors Patrick Macnee and Peter O'Toole meet up in a lift. O'Toole asks Macnee what he's currently working on. "The Avengers," replies Macnee. "Patrick, you're always working on The Avengers," sighs O'Toole.

Born on February 6th, 1922 in London's Paddington district, Daniel Patrick Macnee, who passed away on June 25th at his home in California at the age of 93, enjoyed a successful and prolific career in both movies and television, from his first uncredited appearances in classic British movies like *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and Laurence Olivier's definitive *Hamlet* in 1948 to his last film and television performances nearly fifteen years ago. But it's undoubtedly his role as the urbane, debonair John Steed, the suave and unflappable British Intelligence secret agent he portrayed right across the 1960s in *The Avengers* and again in its incarnation as *The New Avengers* from 1976-7, which will provide him the immortality accorded only to that rare breed of actor whose most famous and defining role and real-life persona become virtually synonymous. Throughout his time in *The Avengers*, John Steed battled evermore outlandish threats alongside a string of assistants - from Ian Hendry's David Keel, Honor Blackman's Cathy Gale, Diana Rigg as Emma Peel, Linda Thorson as Tara King, and in the later series, Joanna Lumley as Purdey and Gareth Hunt as Mike Gambit. But it was always John Steed's show; it wasn't for nothing that the series was known in Germany by a title which translates as *With Umbrella, Charm and Bowler Hat*.

Patrick Macnee enjoyed what can only be described as an unorthodox family life and childhood. Born of aristocratic stock (his Grandmother was a granddaughter of the 12th Earl of Huntingdon), his parents divorced when he was young and he was brought up by both his mother Dorothea and her wealthy girlfriend, who Patrick was encouraged to refer to as 'Uncle Evelyn'. It was Uncle Evelyn who financed the young Patrick's education at Eton College, where as a twelve-year-old he took up smoking and almost burned down his rooms and, during his last year (he was eventually expelled for bookmaking and selling pornography to his fellow pupils) he took to the stage as Macduff in a production of *Macbeth*.

Patrick went on to study acting at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art, but was enlisted into the Royal Navy during World War II before he could make his West End debut. After leaving the Navy in 1946, he found employment as an extra in a number of British movies, which led to credited roles in films and on TV before he moved to Canada where he racked up numerous appearances in American and Canadian television and theatre productions. Becoming frustrated with his acting career, he took a temporary break to become producer on the acclaimed documentary series *The Valiant Years*, based on the World War II memoirs of Winston Churchill.

In 1961, he made his debut as John Steed in *The Avengers*. The series was originally conceived as a vehicle for Ian Hendry (who had recently scored a success in a series called *Police Surgeon*, which in many ways was the forerunner to *The Avengers*), but Steed was promoted to lead when Hendry left

at the end of the first series. Pairing Steed with leather-clad judo expert Cathy Gale was a masterstroke that changed the style and tone of the series forever. By the time Diana Rigg's Emma Peel was established in the series in 1965, the show had become a fast, quirky, tongue-in-cheek, slightly surreal fantasy-adventure series, which was to prove hugely popular in both Britain and America. But the show's falling popularity stateside in 1969 led to its cancellation, and consequently, the lack of American backing made continued British production impossible.

But Patrick was rarely out of regular work. He appeared on episodic American television shows such as *Alias Smith and Jones* and *Columbo*, and played Dr John Watson in 1976 TV movie *Sherlock Holmes in New York* with his old school friend Christopher Lee as Holmes. Patrick would also be one of the few actors to play both Holmes and Watson, finally playing the Great Detective himself in 1993's TV movie *The Hounds of London*. He was back as John Steed for two series of *The New Avengers* in the 1970s, after



which he appeared in feature films such as *The Sea Wolves*, *The Howling*, *This Is Spinal Tap* and, memorably, alongside Roger Moore's 007 in 1985's *A View To A Kill*. TV roles included Count Iblis in two episodes of *Battlestar Galactica* in 1979 (where he'd already been providing, uncredited, the voice of The Imperious Leader of the Cylons) and as Sir John Raleigh in the 1983 reunion movie *The Return of The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

In later life, Patrick moved into the area of voice-over work - he provided a vocal for the best-forgotten 1998 feature film version of *The Avengers* - and apart from the odd public appearance, he considered himself retired for the last fifteen or so years of his life. Married three times (his third wife Baba pre-deceased him by eight years), Patrick was a raconteur, a bon vivant, and every inch a woman's man. He was very much the quintessential Englishman and his passing, just eighteen days after the death of his good friend Christopher Lee, seems to bring the curtain down once and for all on a very special and very unique breed of larger-than-life screen legend.



"Always keep your bowler on in times of stress and watch out for diabolical masterminds." - Emma Peel

"Mrs Peel, we're needed" - John Steed



TIME SHIFT

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TELEFANTASY OF THE '60s AND '70s

by Paul Mount

STARBURST looks back at some of the most iconic, memorable and downright important genre shows from the 1960s and 1970s; shows which often brought the genre into the mainstream and yet created cults and devoted followings which, like many of the shows themselves, still endure into the twenty-first century.

Welcome to the world of TELEFANTASY...

Although both British and American television attempted rudimentary science fiction productions in the 1950s - the BBC transmitted a short live adaptation of Karel Čapek's robot revolution story *RUR* (*Rosumovi Univerzální Roboti* - *Rossum's Universal Robots*) as early as 1933 - with the US children's serials *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (1945-55), *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-55) and *Space Patrol* (1950-55) and in Britain with children's dramas such as *The Lost Planet* (1954) and *Space School* (1956), it was in the 1960s that the genre really began to make its presence felt on both sides of the Atlantic.

The first British genre production to make a significant impact on an adult audience was the BBC's 1953 six-part Nigel Kneale serial *The Quatermass Experiment* which was followed by *Quatermass II* in 1955. These were ground-breaking television productions, water-cooler TV decades before the expression was popularised and the serials were so successful that the country's streets cleared as the public rushed home to see the stuffy Bernard Quatermass tangle with unspeakable horrors from outer space. Kneale, who in 1953 had written a controversial TV adaptation of George Orwell's *1984*, used his Quatermass serials (the third of which, *Quatermass and the Pit*, arrived in 1959) to subtly exploit familiar science fiction themes depicting ordinary people in extraordinary situations underscored with the classic 'science gone bad' trope so often prevalent in the genre, especially in its early post-War days. Science fiction programming became a more familiar ingredient in the television diet as the 1960s rolled around and the audience's demand for material intensified; television was becoming a serious rival to the allure of the big screen which was now offering huge, Technicolor spectacle where science fiction had previously found an uncomfortable niche in the arena of the B-movie, but was slowly becoming a more legitimate form of entertainment.

As the 1960s wore on, the genre began

to more subtly reflect the public's changing tastes and many new shows and concepts which might once have been lazily labelled 'science fiction' were really nothing of the sort. ITC in the UK specialised in the mid/late 1960s in high concept adventure shows with some larger-than-life gimmick in the format, while science fiction tended to become the domain of series ostensibly aimed at children. Meanwhile American TV, broadcasting in colour years before the UK, more readily embraced the genre and, as now, found science fiction an easier fit on the networks than mainstream British television. But these shows - and many of those which followed in the more austere 1970s - were all suffused with the same desire to tell bold and imaginative heightened reality stories. Somewhere along the line the word 'telefantasy' was created, a clumsy description for shows which weren't exactly science fiction (with all the slightly exclusive connotations which came to surround the term) but certainly weren't the audiences'

normal menu of kitchen sink drama, soap operas and tame detective series.

What's interesting in any exploration of genre programming in the 1960s and 1970s - and in reality we can only skim the surface of the best material generated in these restless, voracious years - is the realisation that these two decades are where the stuff of legend was created and brought to the TV screen with shows and series now regarded as genre classics making their debuts. Both decades are peppered with shows which brought the fantasy genre to unusually large audiences, shows which have endured and been reinvented and reimagined time and again in subsequent decades or else have been exhumed from the archive and rediscovered by audiences who weren't even born when they first appeared. It's also arguable that in the 1960s we can find the first stirrings of the phenomenon known nowadays as the 'showrunner', where the tone, style and often the whole narrative direction of a series are determined by



THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT

the original vision of one creative figure, usually the person who actually dreamt up the format in the first place or the person tasked with guiding the show through its birth pangs and easing it onto the screen. Surely in the work of today's high profile showrunners like Bryan Fuller, Chris Carter, J. Michael Straczynski and our own Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat are the ghosts of the work of the legendary names such as Gerry Anderson, Irwin Allen, Gene Roddenberry and Brian Clemens, who blazed a trail for genre television in the 1960s and beyond, years before today's shows, with their story arcs, dense character beats, and ongoing narratives which could sometimes run for six or seven years at least.

The 1960s were to be a decade of innovation, high fashion and extraordinary technological advancement - the space age - and pop culture moved out of the shadows and right into the spotlight. The 1970s, by contrast, were darker years; TV became more aware of growing concerns about rampant technology and mankind's often detrimental effect on the environment and suddenly the naïve TV 'one world' view of *Star Trek* and many of Gerry Anderson's shows and the bright, seemingly-carefree four-colour worlds of *Batman*, *The Avengers* and Irwin Allen's larger-than-life sci-fi adventures became unfashionable and unappealing to audiences who were becoming more aware of the fragility of the planet and concerned not only for their own future but the future of generations yet to be born. But at the beginning of the 1960s, such concerns were still years away and television was suddenly a rich and fertile playground for the imaginations of new storytellers keen to make use of improving production techniques which, whilst still clunky by twenty-first century standards, were improving in leaps and bounds as the medium really found its feet, its purpose and its first real creative rush. In the wake of the arrival of commercial television in 1956, the BBC was forced to strive for a new popularism which sat uneasily with the stuffed shirts of the Corporation's legendary



sixth floor in its then recently-opened Television Centre in London's Shepherd's Bush. ITV had already stolen a march in the science fiction stakes with a string of lively adventure serials for children: the *Target Luna* and the *Pathfinders* serials of 1960 and 1961. Gerry Anderson was establishing his own identity as a creator of exciting puppet adventure series for children (having cut his teeth on cheap productions for the prodigious Roberta Leigh) and his first proper sci-fi show, *Supercar*, launched in 1961, was a massive success and paved the way for much more sophisticated triumphs right across the decade. The BBC's *A For Andromeda* and *The Andromeda Breakthrough* (1961 and 1962, respectively) saw the Corporation return to the arena of adult sci-fi for the first time since *Quatermass*, the two serials dealing both with the arrival of intelligent extra-terrestrial life on Earth and the scramble of the world's governments and business interests to exploit the new technology brought to Earth by the mysterious and alluring creature known as Andromeda (played initially by Julie Christie in her breakthrough role and by Susan Hampshire in the sequel series).

In 1962, ITV screened what was to be the first proper British science fiction anthology series. *Out of This World* was created by the legendary (if formidable) Irene Shubik and its thirteen hour-long science fiction dramas, many of them based on short stories by the likes of Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick and John Wyndham and adapted by writers such as Clive Exton and Terry Nation, were introduced onscreen by Hollywood legend Boris Karloff. Meanwhile, *The Avengers* launched in 1961 as a fairly routine mystery/investigation series starring Patrick Macnee and Ian Hendry, it began to creep towards the format which would make it one of the most popular and influential series of the decade when future Bond girl Honor Blackman joined Macnee's John Steed as the high-kicking, leather-clad Cathy Gale, creating a partnership precedent which would continue with Diana Rigg as Emma Peel and later Linda Thorson in the final

colour series in 1968. *The Avengers* would soon become a wild, colourful heightened-reality fantasy series full of mad professors, killer robots and the occasional murderous alien plant life. Gerry Anderson's first 'space' series *Fireball XL5* was launched and BBC One screened an intriguing Saturday night *Quatermass*-like serial, long since forgotten and lost from the archives, entitled *The Big Pull*, which, in the tradition of many timid genre shows scared to frighten off a broader audience, featured a sinister and stealthy Earth invasion with not an alien tentacle or claw to be seen across its six episodes.

Doctor Who arrived on British TV screens at the end of 1963 - you may have heard of it - and it's impossible to overstate the importance of this hugely iconic title which very much bestrode the British science fiction TV landscape throughout the 1960s and 1970s until it slowly fell out of favour in the 1980s and was finally cancelled in 1989. The astonishing success of its post-2005 resurrection has been exhaustively documented and the series is still pretty much the benchmark on how to make a genre show which can appeal across the generations and yet still attract a healthy cult science fiction crowd. *Doctor Who* was created by Canadian TV dynamo Sydney Newman who had arrived at the BBC as Head of Drama after a stint at ABC (where he'd created, amongst others, *The Avengers*) and initially produced and refined by Verity Lambert, one of the very earliest TV 'showrunners', who went on to work on Newman's later BBC adventure *Adam Adamant Lives!* Gerald Harper played the titular Adamant, a Victorian gentleman adventurer frozen in ice at the beginning of the twentieth century and revived in 1960s swinging London. The series was envisaged as a rival to ITV's slick, glossy *Avengers*, but poor production values and underwritten scripts saw Adam Adamant back on ice at the end of his second season. Lambert herself went on to forge a career as one of the most powerful and respected figures in British television; she worked for Euston Films in the 1970s, before setting up her own



Cinema Verity production company.

By 1965, science fiction was becoming a more familiar mainstay of the schedules on both sides of the Atlantic: more and more accessible crowd-pleasing shows were making an impact on audiences as television became an increasingly popular form of mass entertainment. In 1964, Gerry Anderson plunged deep beneath the sea with the first British UK colour TV production *Stingray*, the adventures of Troy Tempest and his chums at Marineville. In the US, Irwin Allen created *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, the continuing TV adventures of supersub Seaview, based on Allen's 1961 feature film starring Walter Pidgeon. The TV *Voyage*, now starring Richard Basehart and David Hedison, ran for four seasons – the first in black and white – and, like many of Allen's later shows, what started out as a gritty, sophisticated series (many of its stories were espionage or spy thrillers) soon descended into garish colour episodes full of outlandish monsters and histrionic acting. *The Outer Limits*, the American anthology show, is often fondly recalled because of its unashamed front-and-centre approach to presenting stories with actual monsters (the terrifying spider-like 'Zanti Misfits' being one of the best-remembered). It ran from 1963 to 1965, turning up intermittently on ITV stations from 1964 (although the series only ever received a proper UK network airing when BBC Two picked up the entire run and screened it from 1980-81). In 1965, ITV aired stagey Earth-invasion thriller *Undermind*, but the year is much more notable for the arrival of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*, Irwin Allen's *Lost In Space* and, of course, the debut of ABC's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, shamelessly capitalising on the success of James Bond at the cinema and the burgeoning super-spy fad.

By the mid-sixties, the TV schedules on both sides of the Atlantic were virtually



THE PRISONER

bulging with science fiction and fantasy shows, with the American offerings generally boasting bigger and better production values and more outlandish and fantastical storylines and scenarios. Where British genre shows tended to keep one foot in reality and the other firmly in the famous Reithian ethos of using TV "to inform, educate, and entertain", American shows were unafraid to let rip, and many of their shows were unashamedly rattling adventure yarns designed purely to thrill and excite audiences with colourful spectacle and mad, zany stories. In the UK, ITV continued its

flirtation with children's drama with 1966's six-part series *The Master*, which concerned an insane 150-year-old telepathic villain plotting to take over from the world from his base on the island of Rockall (although also long gone from the archives, older readers with long memories will remember the villain's terrifying disintegrating ray which turned its victims into pillars of smoking ash). Gerry Anderson followed up the phenomenal *Thunderbirds* in 1967 with the darker *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, and ITC allowed Patrick McGeehan to follow his spy series *Danger Man* with perhaps one of the most confounding and debated genre shows of all time, *The Prisoner*. The tale of a disenchanted secret agent who finds himself transported to a mysterious cheery village from which there appears to be no escape. So influential is *The Prisoner* (despite its truncated one-season run of just seventeen episodes), that not only was it disastrously remade to no acclaim whatsoever in a six-part mini-series starring Jim Caviezel and Ian McKellen in 2009, but its themes have been 'borrowed' again and again in US shows such as *Nowhere Man*, *Persons Unknown* and even this year's *Wayward Pines*. Meanwhile, *The Invaders* arrived on US TV – A Quinn Martin production! – in which Roy Thinnes' architect David Vincent witnesses the arrival of a flying saucer in the middle of nowhere and then spends two seasons trying to warn the authorities of the invasion of alien doppelgangers distinguishable from human beings only by their crooked little fingers. Although never a huge hit, *The Invaders* was clearly a heavy influence on later shows such as *The X-Files* and the short-lived *Dark Skies*.

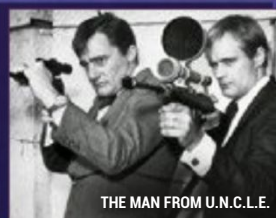
Star Trek had arrived on US TV in 1966 (although, incredibly, by the time it arrived on BBC One in the UK in 1969, it had already been cancelled stateside) and the show is



THE INVADERS



THE OUTER LIMITS



THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



STAR TREK



RANDALL AND HOPKIRK (DECEASED)



LAND OF THE GIANTS

undoubtedly to 1960's US television what *Doctor Who* is in the UK and it's no surprise that both shows remain the most successful science fiction TV franchises of all time, constantly reinvented and reimagined and continually finding new audiences across the generations. To date there have been 703 live-action episodes of various *Star Trek* TV franchises and although the series endures as a rebooted movie series courtesy of J. J. Abrams, it's inevitable that the show will return to its ancestral TV home at some point. Irwin Allen's third series arrived in 1968 but *The Time Tunnel* - two scientists travelling back in time and finding themselves trapped in adventures usually realised with the liberal assistance of stock footage lifted from big budget feature films - only ran for one season and ITC introduced *The Champions*, three secret agents imbued with extraordinary abilities after a plane crash in the Himalayas. *Department S* centred on the exploits of three operatives of a top secret Interpol department (including the extraordinary Jason King played by Peter Wyngarde) investigating impossible unsolvable mysteries. *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* followed in 1969 with Mike Pratt's Jeff Randall working alongside the ghost of his recently-deceased partner Marty Hopkirk (Kenneth Cope); the show would be revived for two brief series on BBC One in 2000 show-run by Charlie Higson, and starring comedy duo Reeves and Mortimer as Marty and Jeff. Gerry Anderson's *Joe 90* debuted, ITV screened its anthology series *Journey To The Unknown* and Irwin Allen launched *Land of the Giants*, his most ambitious series in which a sub-orbital liner passes through a space wormhole (in 1983, no less!) and finds itself trapped on a hostile Earth-like planet inhabited by humanoids forty times the size of the ship's stranded crew and passengers. The show was still extremely popular when

it was cancelled at the end of its second season, entirely due to the prohibitive cost of its production.

By the end of the decade, tastes are clearly changing and certain styles of series are looking a little past their sell-by date. Gerry Anderson's Century 21 stable was slowly winding down; *The Secret Service* was to be a disastrous and quickly-canned mix of live-action and Anderson's trademark Supermarionation. At least Century 21 ended the decade with a flourish in the magnificent *UFO*, a show which combined many of the themes of Gerry's earlier shows, but which probably arrived at the wrong time. Under-appreciated and never fully-networked in the UK, *UFO* - which went on to become a huge hit on American networks when it finally aired in 1972, and came tantalisingly close to receiving a late second series order - has grown to achieve cult status and proper recognition as a genuine ahead-of-its-time genre classic. Stateside, *Star Trek* was gone after three series, Irwin Allen's run of shows had ground to a halt, the superhero fad had seen ABC's *Batman* burn out after three seasons and sister show *The Green Hornet* binned after just one. The end of the spy craze saw *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* cancelled in 1968 midway through its fourth season; its spin-off *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* ran for only twenty-nine episodes. The age of flower power and the summer of love was ending and audiences were becoming tired of bright, breezy but often ultimately shallow fantasy entertainment from the US Networks, while in the UK even *Doctor Who* was losing its appeal and seemed to be on its last legs.

In retrospect - and whether by accident or design or just because of the audience's increasing awareness of the sometimes grim realities of the world around it - 1970s genre TV was to be generally grittier, much more contemporary and often related to

real-world issues and growing concerns about of the perils of unchecked scientific advancement and indeed natural dangers present in the wider world itself. *Doctor Who* escaped extinction by the skin of its teeth when plans for a replacement show came to nothing and the series was reborn in colour, with a new Earth-based format and a flamboyant new star in the shape of Jon Pertwee, who quickly launched the show to new heights of popularity. But Pertwee's first series was much more grounded than the outlandish fantasies of the black and white era and whilst the series eventually returned to its more fantastical style - and even greater success when Tom Baker donned the hat and scarf of the Fourth Doctor at the end of 1974 - it's surely no coincidence that it achieved its early '70s popularity by for a short while emulating the likes of *Quatermass* from fifteen years earlier. *Doctor Who* was joined in the BBC schedules by *Doomwatch*, a series which not only spawned a new word but also properly addressed concerns about technological advancement. It followed a Government department investigated ecological and scientific issues which the public of the time probably weren't even aware of but which had attracted the attention of the show's creators Gerry Davis and Kit Pedler, who, a few years earlier, had created *Doctor Who's* Cybermen as a salutary warning against 'spare part' surgery which was becoming increasingly prevalent during the 1960s. Pedler and Davis often called *Doomwatch* 'science fact' and certainly audiences in the region of twelve million tuned into the first series to witness Dr Spencer Quist and his team (including a young Robert Powell as Toby Wren, killed off at the end of the first series) tackling issues such as embryonics, chemical dumping, computer technology and famously, in '*Tomorrow, the Rat*', genetic breeding. By the third series, the show had



THE CHAMPIONS



THE SECRET SERVICE



UFO



THE TIME TUNNEL



SPACE: 1999



TIMESLIP



THE STONE TAPE



THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN



SURVIVORS

1973 and moved across to TV in a spin-off which was hugely popular in the UK where it commanded audiences of around 12 million viewers. NBC launched *The Invisible Man*, a fast-paced adventure series extremely loosely based on the classic H. G. Wells novel and starring David McCallum which, like its 1976 'reboot' *The Gemini Man* starring Ben Murphy, failed to find a significant audience and, despite popularity in the UK, was cancelled midway through its first season.

Gerry Anderson exploded back onto the screen in 1975 with the lavish *Space: 1999*; at the time the most expensive TV show ever made. A second retooled series in 1976/7 stripped away the mysticism and portentousness of the first, but its dumbed-down simplistic stories turned it into a rather crude and clumsy space opera which turned off audiences who had been attracted to it in the first place. UK TV turned to the apocalypse for its entertainment in 1975 with the thirteen-week children's drama *The Changes*, adapted from a trilogy of books by Peter Dickinson, in which a mystical force turns humanity against technology. Much more successful and better remembered was Terry Nation's *Survivors*, a gripping and intelligent drama which chronicled the hardships endured by a handful remaining after a lethal plague sweeps across the world and wipes out 98% of the world's population. The series ran for three years and was re-envisioned by the BBC in 2008. Although the new series found its feet, poor scheduling sealed its fate and it was cancelled at the end of its second year.

ITV's memorable 1976 children's drama *Sky* continued the 'new' decade's fascination with ecological issues, as an extra-terrestrial stranded in the 1970s fights against a manifestation of Nature which is furiously trying to reject the unnatural interloper. Brian Clemens resuscitated the Avengers as *The New Avengers* in 1976 with Patrick Macnee now joined by Joanna Lumley as Purdey and Gareth Hunt as Mike Gambit. But times had changed and the new series never found the same pace and vibrancy of the original - although Lumley's 'Purdey' hairstyle became briefly fashionable - and a second series, filmed largely in France and Canada, fell completely flat. One of the most extraordinary science fiction shows of the decade - possibly of any decade - arrived around the ITV regions in 1976. This was *Star Maidens*, a bizarre

become more melodramatic and fanciful. Pedler and Davis disassociated themselves with it as they ferociously disagreed with the direction producer Terence Dudley was taking it.

Young viewers could find more traditional, if grounded, thrills in ITV fantasy serials such as *Ace of Wands* and the brilliant *Timeslip*, a marvellously well-reasoned and densely-plotted time-travel series which ran for twenty-six episodes and postulated intelligent time travel theories far removed from the quirkiness of *Doctor Who*'s TARDIS. ITV screened the turgid and moralistic *The Guardians* in 1971 in which the UK in the near future is run by a fascistic paramilitary organisation which has effectively stamped out individual freedom. Nigel Kneale returned in 1972 with his iconic single-play *The Stone Tape*, a ninety-minute Christmas Day hi-tech surreal ghost story inventively directed by Hammer veteran Peter Sasdy.

In 1973, Barry Letts, *Doctor Who*'s producer and script editor, and Terrance Dicks launched their adult space series *Moonbase 3* on BBC One. Set in futuristic 2003, the series was set on a lunar community where the dramas were of a more personal and scientific nature than the more fantastical exploits of the Doctor and his companions. Not surprisingly, the audience weren't hugely interested and only six episodes were ever made; a similar fate

befell 1986's *Star Cops* which resurrected more or less the same idea, but with a more pronounced (but no more attractive) police procedural background. Kids were again well-served in 1973 when Thames TV's *The Tomorrow People*, Roger Price's ongoing saga of 'the next stage of human evolution', arrived on ITV screens. A bunch of teenagers with remarkable abilities such as telekinesis, telepathy and teleportation operated out of a top secret futuristic base hidden in a disused London Underground station. The outlandish and determinedly cheap series (often touted as 'ITV's answer to *Doctor Who*') would run until 1979 and has been reimagined twice, most recently in 2014's short-lived US reboot for The CW Network which, whilst glossy and fast-paced, missed the variety of story and sheer chutzpah of the original, focussing instead on brooding teenage angst and insipid romances.

American TV started to take an interest in the genre again after a few barren years focusing on popular detective and police formats; initially the Networks turned their attentions to high concept adventure shows such as *The Six Million Dollar Man* (and its sister show *The Bionic Woman* which arrived in 1976), which starred Lee Majors as astronaut Steve Austin, injured in a plane crash and rebuilt with bionic limbs and augmentations which gave him super strength and speed. *The Planet of the Apes* film series finally wound down in



THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

thirteen-episode Anglo-German hybrid which starred Gareth Thomas (literally months away from *Blake's Seven*), and Pierre Brice as two escapees from the female-dominated planet Medusa who make their way to Earth in search of liberation. Extraordinarily clumsy, camp and tacky, *Star Maidens* found few fans but sold well internationally and came perilously close to achieving a second season filmed in Canada.

Also worth a mention is the 1976 Gerry Anderson pilot *The Day After Tomorrow*, (also known as *Into Infinity*) a semi-educational, but fatally po-faced, space adventure about a pioneering family striking out across the universe in a big spaceship. American TV continued its preponderance for throwaway fantasy with 1977's *Man from Atlantis* and the short-lived Bermuda Triangle drama *Fantastic Journey*, whilst British TV remained solidly down-to-Earth with the engaging children's dramas *Children of the Stones* (1977) and *King of the Castle* (1978) and BBC Two's gritty 1990 (screened, confusingly, in 1977), which in many ways recalled 1971's *The Guardians* in its tale of a stifling totalitarian regime and those who resist its baleful power.

As the decade began to wind down, it seemed as if genre TV was rediscovering its sense of the absurd and the amazing. American TV launched comic strip-based series *The Incredible Hulk* and *Wonder Woman*, both of which were to prove successful and long-running (*Spider-Man*, in 1977, was quickly squished); both were precursors to the comic strip films and TV which dominate today. BBC One launched low-budget space opera *Blake's 7* at the end of 1978, and whilst the show quickly gained a legion of admirers captivated by its character-driven stories (and especially its glowering anti-hero Kerr Avon, played with impeccable starkness by Paul Darrow), the series looked painfully cheap when compared with *Star Wars*, which had arrived on cinema screens a few months earlier and, at a stroke, made British science fiction look very much like the poor relation. It's arguable that *Star Wars* ultimately brought down



STAR MAIDENS



THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES



BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY



BATTLESTAR GALACTICA



THE NEW AVENGERS

the curtain on UK TV science fiction as a workable genre as executives decided that TV budgets just couldn't compete with the spectacle of big-budget Hollywood feature films, and that TV audiences would no longer tolerate the cardboard-and-sticky-tape production values which had brought shows like *Doctor Who* onto the air in more innocent times.

The decade ended with the US mini-series *The Martian Chronicles*, as well as the glossy *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (which delivered a crippling ratings blow to *Doctor Who* when the two shows were pitched opposite one another in 1980) and *Battlestar Galactica*, both inspired by the renewal in interest in space operas engendered by *Star Wars* (*Galactica* only really fulfilling its potential when remade by Ronald D. Moore as a tough, allegorical military space adventure in 2004). *Doctor Who*, tired and jaded, prepared for a glitzy makeover as it approached the 1980s. Perhaps the TV sci-fi circle is, to an extent, squared as the decade ended with the revival of a character who had been there virtually at the beginning of the story of TV science fiction; Bernard Quatermass made his return in a grim and apocalyptic four-part ITV series from Euston Films which aired in 1979. Where Quatermass in the 1950s had introduced audiences to the possibilities of the genre with a sense of optimism amidst its tales of alien infiltration, the tired, exhausted Quatermass who shuffled off the screen in the last of the four episodes of *Quatermass* in many ways summed up the sense of despair, distrust and disillusionment which had characterised many of the new shows which had thrived during the 1970s. Perhaps the 1980s would give rise to a new optimism and a new spirit of adventure?



BLAKE'S 7

LIVE AND LET SPY

by Jack Bottomley

STARBURST takes a look at the agents of espionage who dominated television...

How do we describe a spy? Do gadgets, girls and gin make a gentleman spy or is it a more relentlessly action-packed and punishing profession? In reality, it's probably a life of excessive filing and confidential research, but seeing as we can't write about real spies (they're mostly anonymous - go figure), we instead look at the small screen and some of its greatest fictional exponents. For generations, we've been enthralled by secrecy (after all, what would be the point of keeping secrets that weren't interesting?) and while spy fiction predates the 1900s, the

1930s cinematic output of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock tapped into the idea of shady agencies and mesmerising tales of mystery (*The 39 Steps*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*) and what would become token themes of authoritative distrust spurred on by the rise of fascism and WW2. However, the genre became a phenomenon with the outbreak of the Cold War in the '50s - and yes, Ian Fleming's James Bond might have had something to do with it - but forget the bonk-barmy Bond and set your sights on the next few pages, as we monitor some of the box's best secret agents.

In the 1960s and '70s, Bond's popularity grew and spy fiction boomed as other noteworthy spies were born. Much has already been made this issue of Sam Rolfe's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964-68) and Guy Ritchie's upcoming remake. The show starred Robert Vaughn and David McCallum, as Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin. Suffice to say, it impacted the genre (hell, we dedicated a bloody mag to it). Originally titled Ian Fleming's Solo - as Fleming contributed early on - *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* owed a lot to the writing of Fleming and Hitchcockian themes, telling the story of an observant world beyond mundane society. Light in tone, with lashings of suspense, the show proved popular and eventually tried its hand at other genres like sci-fi and comedy, which is the direction *U.N.C.L.E.* eventually went.

When it first began, *U.N.C.L.E.* was the only spy show on TV, but by Season Two (1966), there were many and the show ventured more into parody (to challenge ABC's *Batman*) before reverting back to seriousness in Season Four, but the resulting ratings drop led to the show's cancellation. Still, *U.N.C.L.E.*'s success led to merchandising and a less successful spin-off in *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* (1966-67) starring Stefanie Powers as agent April Dancer. However, the leading duo were *U.N.C.L.E.*'s top draw. Vaughn's American Agent Solo was the 'Red, White and Bond' agent, less forceful but with sophisticated tastes and Cary Grant-ish suave, whereas McCallum's more intense USSR Agent Kuryakin, whose unfathomable popularity elevated him to co-lead, was his polar opposite emotionally. Kuryakin was enigmatic yet irresistible, as proved by the fact McCallum received more fan mail (much of it female) than any other MGM actor! *U.N.C.L.E.*'s evolution is rather reflective of the direction the spy genre has taken over the years (constantly switching from gravitas to pastiche), with characters that straddled professional and sexy.

Outside of *U.N.C.L.E.*, the competition was rife, one example being ITV's legendary



THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



RETURN OF THE SAINT

The Saint (1962-69), starring Roger Moore as Simon Templar, one of the genre's most successful characters. *The Saint* was Moore's gateway to roles like Brett Sinclair (alongside Tony Curtis as Danny Wilde) in *The Persuaders!* (1971-72) and, of course, his Bond tenure. Templar started life in the 1920s, created by Leslie Charteris and flourishing across the pages of many novels - the plots of which were used in the series among original plotlines. Moore was an enormous fan of the character already (he'd turned down Bond due to his commitment to the series), so his casting as Templar worked wonders. *The Saint* began as an episodic mystery drama, before relishing elements of the genre with Templar being a perverse (and less green) Robin Hood figure (only he kept the dosh).

Templar bordered 'Moore' on the criminal side, with an ongoing rivalry (and occasionally reluctant teaming) with Inspector Claude Teal (Ivor Dean). Boasting a darker edge, especially in the novels, where he would think very little of taking lives albeit for the cause of saving the innocent. Perhaps this, meshed with the character's maverick humour (he leaves a halo calling card at the scene of his crimes - although his targets were hardly victims), is what made him so compelling. Further embellished by the episode's final breaking of the fourth wall, where Templar acknowledges the audience directly. *The Saint*'s success urged revival attempts, from 1978's *Return of the Saint* starring Ian Ogilvy to the infamous box office bomb that was Hollywood's codswallop remake starring Val Kilmer in 1997, which ignored the character's traits, creating instead a castrated version of Charteris' (who wasn't even credited as creating) Templar. *The Saint* prospered among the spy influx in the '60s, but another British series would become equally iconic, for boasting trendy characters and avant-garde style.

The Avengers (no, not those ones) started in 1961 and starred Ian Hendry as Dr David Keel, following his unconnected role in the less fruitful *Police Surgeon*. The show saw Keel investigate the murder of

his fiancée and receptionist by a drug ring, looking at how he came to eventually partner with John Steed (show mainstay Patrick Macnee) on other cases. The first series focused on Keel, but Steed's importance rose as Hendry left to pursue films, so Steed became the focus over six series, and was partnered with numerous characters. Like *U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Avengers* vastly changed during its run, embracing styles that often altered the genre. Series Two introduced Honor Blackman's combat trained, leather-clad anthropologist Dr Cathy Gale - a character unlike any other on British TV and, despite her leaving after Series Three to star in *Goldfinger*, the Gale-era furthered the show's popularity and led to it adopting wilder ideas of sexual chemistry and innuendo-laden dialogue that pushed the envelope at the time.

Steed's character was methodically broadened by hints at his military backstory and his transformation from rugged stranger to trench coat-wearing (a)gent, with a vintage fashion sense and vehicular taste to match. His young, contemporary partners provided the contrast and likewise the show came to exhibit cultish elements birthing the "spy-fi" genre with its eccentrically fantastical plotting. Diana Rigg's Emma Peel (debuting in Series Four) also developed comic chemistry with Steed, leading to a change of tone from earlier series; the show became an amalgamation of styles, trends and fads, which led to its worldwide appeal. The futuristic side expanded through various sci-fi plots in Series Five, as well as a meta element. The show even wryly parodied shows like *U.N.C.L.E.* and Bruce Geller's *Mission: Impossible* (1966-73), which had made its own stamp on spy telefiction.

After Rigg's departure (following a tiff with producers and landing a role in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*), *The Avengers* returned to a serious tone at the behest of the network. As a result of this, and Rigg's exit, Steed was paired with Linda Thorson's Tara King. King was very different, as she was his only partner who was a trained spy, and was far more innocent than some of Steed's more feisty associates. Despite



THE AVENGERS

financial difficulties, rewrites, and producers being swapped and chopped, the show with Tara continued to be successful, until bad scheduling saw the series draw to a close. Rigg returned to film a farewell for her character, who had left British Intelligence to be with her husband (who she discovered was alive). After its main run ended, Macnee returned as Steed (in more of a mentor capacity - since the actor was 53 at this point) for the less prosperous and problematically-produced sequel series *The New Avengers*, which saw Steed partnered with marksman and martial artist Mike Gambit (Gareth Hunt) and former Royal Ballet trainee, Purdey (Joanna Lumley). And yes, in 1998, 'that movie' remake was released; starring the uncharismatic pairing of Ralph Fiennes as Steed and Uma Thurman as Emma Peel, the film was a notorious flop and now 'enjoys' a reputation as one of the worst films ever.

During the same period, audiences were introduced to Ralph Smart's ultra-realistic Cold War-centered *Danger Man* (1960-68), which introduced British agent John Drake (Patrick McGoochan), who was the anti-Bond. McGoochan denounced the promiscuity of



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE



DANGER MAN



THE PRISONER



007; instead Drake was a cool customer, using more believable gadgets (cigarette lighter camera and the like). *Danger Man* was an ironic title, as Drake was dangerous through intellect and ability as opposed to force (Drake only shot one person), infiltrating targets through role-playing. Many still insist McGoonhan portrayed Drake in McGoonhan/George Markstein's 17-episode genre mash-up *The Prisoner* (1967-68), which saw a former unnamed British agent held captive at a coastal resort. Though McGoonhan attested Drake was not 'The Prisoner', many claim those working on both shows considered *The Prisoner* to be an elaboration of *Danger Man*.

All the same, both characters offered audiences more grounded leads and have sustained a lasting legacy, with *The Prisoner* being unsuccessfully remade as a miniseries in 2009 (starring Jim Caviezel and Ian McKellen), and as many will know, *Danger Man* came to inspire several others, most lightheartedly of all, *Danger Mouse* (1981-1992). Voiced by David Jason, the eye patch-wearing Danger Mouse was a super-agent that lived in a post box-based headquarters and alongside his bumbling

specs-wearing Hamster sidekick, Penfold (Terry Scott), went on various dangerous missions, mostly against his arch nemesis the tonsillitis-voiced toad Silas Greenback (Edward Kelsey), and his crow henchman Stiletto (Brian Trueman) – "*Ce Barone!*" *Danger Mouse* was a playful parody, which became a landmark children's series with prominent characters, with CBBC's technologically advanced reboot of the show arriving this year starring Alexander Armstrong.

You might say the genre had become overstuffed. Spy shows and their characters followed trends, but the choice between realism and self-aware humour were in binary opposition. So it is of little surprise that Mel Brooks dedicated a show to lampooning spies, in turn creating a hit series in *Get Smart* (1965-1970). Starring Don Adams as CONTROL Agent Maxwell Smart, alongside Barbara Feldon's Agent 99, the character is trained yet inept, often finding himself in the thick of it – and that is just at headquarters! However, Smart is skilled in his own way and the loveable lead was the integral reason behind the show's enduring run. *Get Smart* spoofed all the genre's big hitters and popularised catchphrases like "*And... loving it!*" and "*would you believe...*" It even spawned a TV film in 1989, *Get Smart, Again!* Plus, it is one of the few shows covered here that got a decent movie remake (gasp!), after failing attempts to revive the characters (Fox's 1995 series), in Peter Segal's devotedly silly 2008 *Get Smart*, starring Steve Carell.

Spies continued to saturate the market; *Callan* (1967-72) introduced Edward Woodward's David Callan – a government branch professional killer. Whereas others like David Friedkin and Morton Fine's *I Spy* (1965-68), starring Robert Culp and Bill Cosby, broke new ground – introducing a black lead in Cosby's Alexander Scott, *I Spy* also received a misguided remake in 2002's Eddie Murphy/Owen Wilson Comedy (when will they learn?). It was a literal battleground, with later offerings including the highly successful BBC John Le Carré

adaptations *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) and *Smiley's People* (1982), which saw Alec Guinness bring to life top tier retired British agent George Smiley (recently played with grace by Gary Oldman in Tomas Alfredson's excellent *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*). Adaptations like these were welcome in an era when the genre was spirited in nature, lacking the gravitas that characters like Smiley delivered in abundance. Then there were experimental examples like Michael Garrison's successful (cancelled due to TV restrictions on violence) early steampunk western spy series *The Wild Wild West* (1965-69), set in the Ulysses Grant administration (1869-77). *West* is an item of cult affection and introduced 'Bond on horseback' agents James T. West (Robert Conrad) and Artemus Gordon (Ross Martin) to screens. Naturally, the Will Smith-led 1999 movie remake was another infamously unfaithful tits-up (cracking mechanical spider, though).

However, as real world politics shifted, more realistic offerings appeared, likely spurred on by the relentless ridiculing of the genre by *Austin Powers*, with Mike Myers' goofy lead character being the ultimate piss-take of vintage spy-era motifs. In the modern day, characters like Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) in Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran's real-time thriller *24* (2001-present) and Sir Harry Pearce (Peter Firth) in the BBC's drama series *Spooks*, created by David Wolstencroft, have fashioned very stripped-back espionage exploits. Still, shows like Simeon Goulden's sitcom *Spy* (2011), starring Darren Boyd and Robert Lindsay as Tim Elliot and The Examiner respectively, and Adam Reed's chic, adult, animated series *Archer* (2010-now) introducing the confident New York agent Sterling Archer, show that the genre and its characters still have the reflexivity they always have. Television has reacted to the big screen at times and there is no doubting that Bond was the catalyst, but these characters have all stood the test of time, elevating spy fiction into other genres and directions and still draw crowds to this day. Mission: Accomplished!



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AGENTS OF ACRONYM

by Ed Fortune

The United Network Command for Law and Enforcement (U.N.C.L.E.) isn't the only super secretive organisation with an interesting codename to have amazing stories told about it. Not every group has a cool underground base and an acronym that just happens to spell out a mission-appropriate word, but most of them do. We take a look at some of our favourites - good, evil and indifferent.



SPECTRE

The granddaddy of all super-villain clubs, the Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion were the bad guys who gave James Bond so much to do in the '60s movies. Organised by the evil genius Ernst Stavro Blofeld, SPECTRE gave Bond a whole roster of iconic-looking goons to use his license to kill on. SPECTRE only appears in a handful of Ian Fleming novels; the real baddies in the books are SMERSH, an organisation very loosely based on a Soviet-era Russian organisation of the same name.

KINGSMAN

A secret agency formed of highly trained (and impeccably dressed, as they should be since a gentlemen's tailors fronts their hidden base) Englishmen, The Kingsman intelligence group appear in the movie of the same name. Based on Mark Millar's comic book *The Secret Service* (which it bears a passing resemblance to), Members of Kingsman are named after King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table and are just as adept in battle. The movie is also hilarious and splendidly violent in many ways.



StormWatch

WildStorm Comics' own version of S.H.I.E.L.D. never bothered to try and explain its acronym. Notable only for its James Bond/Nick Fury hybrid hero, John Stone, StormWatch actually got up to some genuine double agent-style intrigue by betraying its superhuman allies for the greater good.

HYDRA

One of the things that makes Captain America such a great hero is that he's usually beating up the right sort of bad guy. Hydra makes a perfect collection of monsters. It's elite officers include the Red Skull, Madame Hydra and Baron Von Strucker, villains who worked for Hitler himself back in the day, and are still hale and hearty thanks to the machinations of evil scientists. In both the movies and the comics, S.H.I.E.L.D. and Hydra have been different sides of the same coin, one trying to save the world whilst the other tries to destroy it.



S.H.I.E.L.D.

Anyone who's seen an action movie in the last few years will be familiar with S.H.I.E.L.D., the super-intelligence agency from Marvel comics. Perhaps best known for Nick Fury, a secret agent who was always meant to look like the coolest man on the planet (which is why in the older comics he looks like Frank Sinatra and in the movies he's Samuel L. Jackson). The acronym S.H.I.E.L.D. has stood for a number of things all through Marvel's long comic book history, but the mission is the same; defend the Earth from all sorts of exotic threats, terrestrial or celestial. As Agent Coulson puts it in the movies, someone just really wanted the agency to be called S.H.I.E.L.D. They also have some of the best toys; flying cars, Helicarriers, and even machines to teleport or make you invisible. S.H.I.E.L.D.'s flexibility was often only limited by its budget, which was a frequent plot hook throughout the eighties to explain why S.H.I.E.L.D. didn't simply solve all the world's problems with its cool toys.



S.H.I.E.L.D. doesn't work alone either; it has other 'sibling' agencies. S.W.O.R.D. is led by the green-haired Agent Abigail Brand, and they deal exclusively with alien threats from their sword-shaped space station, A.R.M.O.R. watch interdimensional portals, mostly for incursions from ravenous zombies, and W.A.N.D. deal with solely magical threats. All of them have two things in common: they share horribly contrived acronyms and none of them have a single agent who is as cool as Nick Fury.

COBRA

When toy manufacturer Hasbro went looking for a theme for their new range of action figure-sized G.I. Joe toys, they didn't look very far; they took a lot of inspiration from Marvel, specifically S.H.I.E.L.D. and Hydra. Marvel, of course, did the comics for the toy range. Whereas G.I. Joe took inspiration from the American military, Cobra is pure super-villainy. Featuring mad robots, iron-masked arms dealers and leather-clad ninjas, the brightly-coloured toys had a strong comic book feel. Worse still, most of their world domination plans were utterly ridiculous, including trying to set up their own evil TV station and hiding nuclear bombs in burgers.

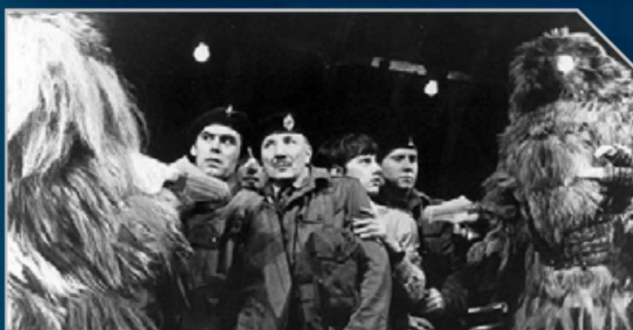


W.H.O.

The Weird Happenings Organisation featured briefly in Marvel's *Excalibur* series. Another elite British military squad tasked with dealing with odd things like alien invasions, they were more than a slight nod to U.N.I.T. in *Doctor Who*. Marvel eventually replaced them with espionage group/superhero team MI13, which (interestingly) was written by *Doctor Who* writer Paul Cornell.

U.N.I.T.

We couldn't do a list like this without mentioning U.N.I.T., the elite military organisation from *Doctor Who*. U.N.I.T. originally stood for the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, but the UN apparently asked for a change, so they swapped it out for UNified in 2008. They made their debut in 1968, shooting at robot yetis in the classic episode *Web of Fear*, and have continued to be the Doctor's plucky allies ever since. Key figures include the dryly sarcastic Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, the plucky Sergeant Benton, and barely competent technical officer Tom Osgood.



TORCHWOOD

Another secretive organisation from the world of *Doctor Who*, Torchwood was meant to be Earth's defence against the monsters when the Doctor wasn't about. Alas, they seemed more interested in getting each other in bed than anything else.



A.R.G.U.S.

DC Comics took the idea of a super spy agency in a slightly different direction than Marvel. Whereas S.H.I.E.L.D. owes a lot to James Bond and Q Division, A.R.G.U.S. are thoroughly pragmatic and a very American sort of outfit. The group dates back to the American Civil War and originally stood for Armed Revolutionaries Governing Under Secrecy. As time went on, it became Anonymous Ranger Group of the United States. Of course, as DC comics have reset the continuity every other week, it's hard to tell exactly what the official origin story is, but their actions speak for themselves. They trust no one but themselves, and will gleefully throw various superheroes under a bus if they think that will serve the greater good. Darker and grittier than most things in the DC Universe, they're best known for Amanda Waller, an agent who looks more like a call centre manager than a superspy. Waller is responsible for the Suicide Squad, that elite team of disposable metahumans who are soon to feature in their own movie.

WASP

The World Aquanaut Security Patrol, from Gerry Anderson's *Stingray*, were less of a secretive organisation and more a team of agents who almost dragged humanity into a war with a highly advanced undersea race every week. Luckily, the hostile Aquaphibians had a terrible spy network on land, so they were easily thwarted every time. Each member of WASP had a sea-inspired name (Shore, Tempest, Fisher, etc.), which seemed to be the only qualification needed to join.



SHADO

Staying with the worlds of Gerry Anderson, the live-action TV show *UFO* featured SHADO, the Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation. Their base was disguised as a film studio; a perfect cover for an group that has to use weird looking devices to fight aliens.



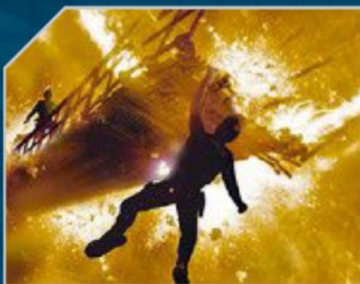
XCOM

The eXtraterrestrial COMbat agency from the XCOM video game series deserves an honourable mention. Easily the spiritual successor to the *UFO* TV series, XCOM had some amazing toys thanks to their ability to steal all the good ideas from the alien invaders. They aren't much good at espionage, however, as they tend to shoot first and ask questions later. But when your enemy has eerie mind control powers, that's usually a good idea.

H.I.V.E.

There are two organisation called H.I.V.E. that are worth mentioning, both of whom are baddies. First is Mark Walden's Higher Institute of Villainous Education, an organisation that trains super-villains. The college is, of course, located within a volcano, and those children who aren't terribly interested in ruling the world can always take the Henchmen course instead.

The other H.I.V.E. is from DC Comics, and is strongly rumoured to be the focus of the new season of the TV show *Arrow*. The Hierarchy of International Vengeance and Extermination are a conspiracy of criminal scientists led by someone who calls themselves Queen Bee. They tend to go for lots of kidnapping and mind control, and aren't terribly good at being subtle. Rather than infiltrating governments with brainwashed drones like a good criminal conspiracy, they tend to run around in bright yellow suits and use hordes of glassy-eyed civilians to get their way, though with another DC reboot on its way, there's always a chance it'll change.



A.I.M.

Talking of bees, A.I.M. is sort of Marvel's version of H.I.V.E.

Another group of scientists (who describe themselves as evil), they run around in bright yellow radiation suits that make them look like psychotic bee-keepers. A.I.M. made a very short-lived appearance in the movie *Iron Man 3* as well, though it's likely we'll see more from them in the future. Their main contribution to the world of super-villainy is the creation of M.O.D.O.K. (Mental Organism Designed Only for Killing). It's a giant head with tiny limbs that floats around on a special chair, sort of like an even grosser version of Dan Dare nemesis The Mekon. M.O.D.O.K. is also equipped with some cool weapons and a screechy, childish voice. Like all good bad guys.



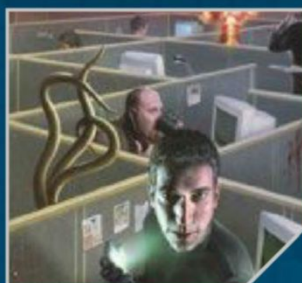
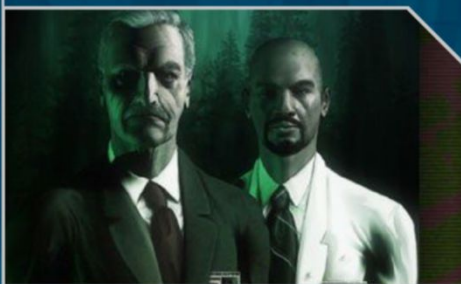
ORION

Dungeons and Dragons creators TSR also brought us a game about spies, called *Top Secret/S.I.* The game focused on the exploits of international espionage and crime fighting bureau Orion, an organisation founded with one purpose;

to thwart the efforts of an evil capitalist conspiracy called Web. Orion had a nifty theme inspired by the zodiac; each base was named after an astrological symbol. Though pretty bland for a fantasy spy organisation (they were modelled more on real agencies than anything else), Orion's big secret is that they were a puppet created by Web.

DELTA GREEN

Traditionally, stories based in the Cthulhu Mythos feature a small band of civilians out of their depth. John Tyne's *Delta Green* setting updates the Mythos by suggesting that at one point, the American government knew enough about the threat of Cthulhu and the other Elder Gods to form a military task unit to deal with it all. Alas, the funding has long since been cut, and in the modern day, it's up to a conspiracy involving the FBI, CIA, NCIS, ATF, the CDC and other real world agencies to keep up the good fight.



THE LAUNDRY

Last but not least, Charlie Stross' *The Laundry* series covered a group of occult investigators who were on the civil service payroll. This very British (and barely competent) secret agency is best known via the short story *Equoid*, which won Stross a Hugo Award in 2014.

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OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



A Festival of WHO

Following the success of previous BBC-sanctioned **Doctor Who** celebrations at the Millennium centre in Cardiff in 2012 and the 50th Anniversary event at the ExCeL in London's Docklands in November 2013, the BBC has announced another event – the **Doctor Who Festival** – which will again be held at the ExCeL between Friday November 13th and Sunday November 15th. The event will also take place in Australia at Sydney's Hordern Pavilion and Royal Hall of Industries on November 21st/22nd. The full itinerary for the London event is yet to be revealed, but current Doctor Peter Capaldi and showrunner Steven Moffat are expected to be in attendance, and the Festival offers the opportunities for fans to meet the cast and writers, examine displays of costumes and props, study 'the latest film sets', a Drama School, Production Village and the inevitable Cosplay Showcase. Tickets and further information about the events are available from doctorwhofestival.com.

Series Nine Round-Up

As production on the forthcoming ninth series of **Doctor Who** enters the home straight, the BBC has confirmed that Rachel Talalay, who directed Series Eight's two-part finale *Dark Water/Death in Heaven*, is returning to helm this year's concluding instalments, written as ever by showrunner Moffat. Meanwhile, a writer new to the series – Sarah Dollard – has been announced as providing the script for the still-untitled tenth episode. Australian-born Dollard, whose previous credits include episodes of BBC Three's **Being Human**, recent BBC Two drama **The Game** and... er... as a script editor/story-liner for Aussie soap **Neighbours**, says: "Getting to play in the **Doctor Who** toy box is a dream come true. It's a total honour to contribute to a show that has brought me such joy as a fan. However, writing for Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman has presented a serious problem: some days I've been too excited to actually type!" Sarah's episode, which will feature the return of Joivan Wade as graffiti artist Riggs from Series Eight's standout episode *Flatline*, will be directed by Justin Molotnikov, another newcomer to the series who has previously directed episodes of fellow BBC fantasy dramas **Merlin** and **Atlantis**. On the casting front, Peter Capaldi's former **The Thick of It** co-star Rebecca Front (currently appearing in C4's drama **Humans**) has been confirmed as guest-starring in episodes seven and eight, which are written by Peter (Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell) Harness and feature the return of both UNIT (Unified Intelligence Taskforce) and the Time Lords' old shape-shifting adversaries the Zygons. Front is the latest in a line-up of guest cast for the series, which includes comedian Rufus Hound, former **The Bill/Bugs** star Jaye Griffiths, Paul Kaye, **Game of Thrones**' Maisie Williams and, of course, Michelle Gomez, who reprises her role as Missy/The Master in the two-part series opener.

Doctor Who is expected to return to BBC One in the UK and BBC America in the states in the autumn.

Steven Moffat, OBE

Showrunner Steven Moffat was awarded the prestigious OBE – (Most Excellent) Order of the British Empire – for his 'services to drama' in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in June. Moffat, who also co-created the smash BBC drama hit **Sherlock** with Mark Gatiss, told the BBC, "I never thought I would get something like this, I'm astonished and more thrilled than I ever thought someone like me would be. I'm not the least bit cynical, or the least bit trying to be cool about it. I'm just really, really happy. Moffat's predecessor, Russell T Davies, was similarly bestowed in 2008 and **Sherlock** star Benedict Cumberbatch was made a CBE – Commander of the Order of the British Empire – in this year's honours.



network

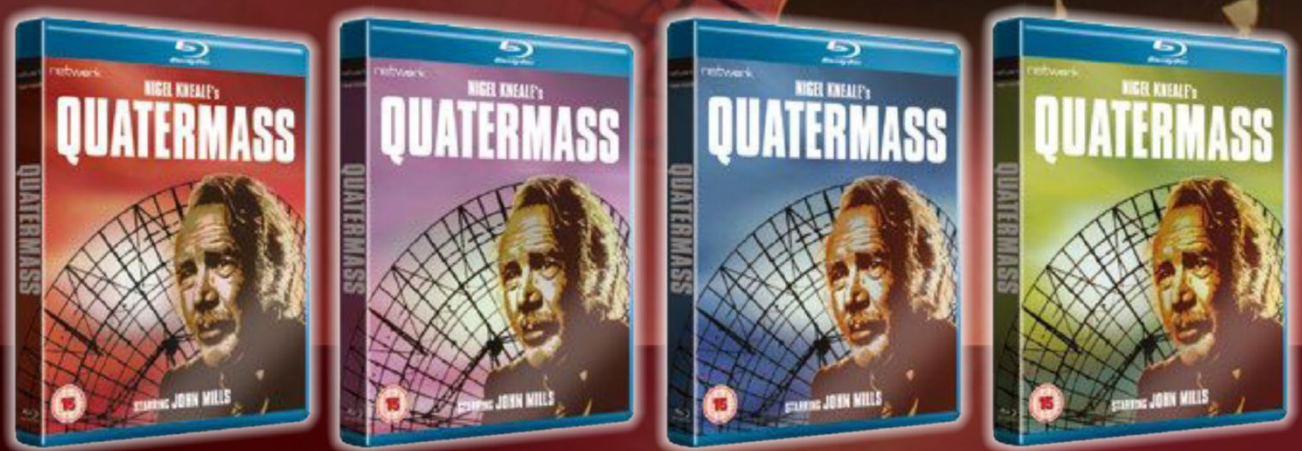
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WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



Following the broadcast of *The Deadly Assassin* in 1976, the young *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society asked in its review of the story, "What has happened to the magic of *Doctor Who*?" Indeed, they voted the story bottom of the poll in their series review of 1977, whereas nowadays it is considered a classic and the three years during which Philip Hinchcliffe was in charge of the series are regarded as perhaps *Doctor Who*'s finest ever. As is so often the case, *Doctor Who*'s hardcore fandom – the self-appointed arbiters of what constitutes good taste – were flying in opposition to what the general viewing audiences of the period, who would subsequently grow up to become the next generation of hardcore fandom, were enjoying.

Philip Hinchcliffe wasn't popular among the hardcore for any number of reasons prior to *The Deadly Assassin*'s transmission. With *Genesis of the Daleks* having rewritten Dalek history, and stories like *Pyramids of Mars* and *The Brain of Morbius* transgressing in other areas, a story in which Time Lord society is

reduced to common scandal was bound to be considered an affront. The appearance of the Master was the least offensive part of the story, despite being a character beloved of those hardcore when they were younger. The Time Lord had been played up until this point by just a single actor, moreover one who had recently died, with the part being recast with someone else entirely, unrecognisable under the costume of a walking cadaver. The more things change...

38 years later, and the lessons imparted by history appear not to have been learned.

If most people would now agree that the first three Tom Baker seasons were the programme's finest hour, then equally they'd be unlikely not to have wished for more from Hinchcliffe and his sidekick Robert Holmes. Imagine a fourth series with the imagination and production values that gave us *Terror of the Zygons*, *The Robots of Death* and *The Seeds of Doom*, rather than the interim grimness of *The Invisible Enemy* or *Underworld*. Of course, we have no

idea how things might have played out, but even if Hinchcliffe's producership was cut short by a BBC management that moved him on prematurely, the legacy he left is astonishing.

Things would be so very different ten years later. Producer John Nathan-Turner was stuck in a job he'd rather have moved on from, *Doctor Who* was failing not just in the eyes of fandom but in those of the corporation that produced it and the general population too, and the promise that had been demonstrated during Series 18 and with such stories as *Earthshock* and the initially unpopular *Kinda* was now ebbing away, into the imposed hiatus that followed the twin disasters of series openers *Warriors of the Deep* and *Attack of the Cybermen*. *Doctor Who* might have been earning more for the BBC than any other programme on their books, but they'd lost interest – and it wasn't long before they'd allowed it to quietly die.

That was almost three decades ago, and lessons have very much been learned – on the corporation's behalf.

These days, they couldn't be more

supportive of the programme. While annual renewal of ongoing series is still conventionally the technical process, *Doctor Who* has recently been given assurances that will take it up to the turn of the decade and probably beyond. Meanwhile, showrunner Steven Moffat has mentioned talk of 'five-year plans', unthinkable when Philip Hinchcliffe was boss, even more so when JN-T was in charge. And the series isn't just popular with the organisation that makes it, it consistently achieves both high viewing figures and high audience appreciation (AI) figures with the watching population too.

There's a reason why the combination of these two factors is more significant than either one of them alone. High AIs can be common among 'cult' programming, where small audiences seek out things they like and are therefore often happy with what they're watching, but they tend to be less common with more popular programmes, especially ones during prime time which might be caught by audiences that aren't necessarily attuned to the content. To have large audiences that are demonstrably enjoying what is being produced is quite an achievement.

One thing that's even nicer for the current producers of *Doctor Who* is the way the programme has changed over the last five years. Previous showrunner Russell T Davies hit a winning formula and stuck with it, increasing his audience year on year. But Steven Moffat has shaken the format up with every successive series he's been in charge, and rather than driving audiences away, it's a development that has instead increased them still further; the actual viewing figures over the last half a decade might be slightly lower than they were when RTD departed, but across a number of new platforms the programme is actually being watched by more people – and globally its audience has increased to unprecedented levels.

This year, Steven Moffat is shaking up the format still further, and Series Nine looks to be comprised almost entirely of



two-part or interconnected stories. It's a move that seems made partially in order to appease fans who prefer their *Doctor Who* rather slower-moving – not that Moffat's previous two-parters have always been that, nor indeed that his single-parters haven't. Although judging by the content there will be as much to complain about as ever – especially in the series opener, which has elsewhere been described as possibly Moffat's greatest ever story. We'll see what the Internet makes of it when the time comes...

There are a couple of stories by female writers this year, which is good. Equally, it's nice to see Jamie Mathieson and Toby Whithouse returning, even if fans might be slightly more dubious about Peter Harness. Personally, I'd have liked to have seen Frank Cottrell-Boyce back too.

It was also recently confirmed, in an announcement that shocked some fans and disturbed others, that Moffat will be staying on beyond the ninth series and taking charge of Series Ten as well. There are some voices that are comparing him with John Nathan-Turner, who had intended upon doing only three years when he took control of the series in 1980, and ended up seeing out the

entire decade. JN-T was the victim of an aforementioned BBC that cared so little for the programme (and for him, it must be added) that they wouldn't bother finding somebody else to run it (or something else for him to run). Fans are speculating that the opposite is the case with Moffat, and that the BBC are having trouble prising him out of the hot seat.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Moffat left some exceptionally gainful employ (scriptwriting for Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson) in order to take the job, and since he's been there has become perhaps the BBC's greatest money-earner – his two series, *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who*, together far out-earning even the behemoth that was until recently, *Top Gear*. It is more likely that the BBC are begging him to stay as long as possible, rather than secretly plotting his departure. It wouldn't be remotely surprising if the 'five year plan' mentioned earlier didn't include Moffat across its entire term.

But we should be careful what we wish for. Had Moffat left after *The Time of the Doctor* (as we might have expected him to, perhaps, given that the timing seemed so appropriate), then we would never have been able to watch *Listen*, *Mummy on the Orient Express* or *Flatline*. Or, for that matter, *The Caretaker*, *Kill the Moon*, or *Death in Heaven*. The quality hasn't dipped in the last year or two, it has increased. *The Day of the Doctor* was recently voted the greatest *Doctor Who* story of all time, and it's hard to disagree. Given that the man in charge of the series is the man responsible for producing *Vincent and the Doctor*, *The Doctor's Wife* and *The Girl Who Waited* (among many, many more), it seems the longer his tenure continues, the more out-and-out classics he will supply.

When the dust settles on the Steven Moffat era, in ten or twenty years' time when the next-but-one showrunner is in charge of the series, we'll look back and count our lucky stars that it lasted as long as it did. Or rather, the next generation of fans will – while presumably lambasting whosoever is in charge by then.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





THE DOCTOR WHO REALITY SHOW

With *Big Brother* currently offering fifteen minutes of fame to anyone brave or foolish enough to do *anything* to get it, has there ever been a better mirror for it than *Doctor Who*? While Colin Baker's Sixth incarnation is undoubtedly the Marmite Doctor - in the sense that you either love or hate him, much like the opinion dividing toast/sandwich spread - it's tempting to ponder whether Russell T Davies had his notebook out during a repeat viewing of *Vengeance on Varos* sometime in 2005. You will of course recall that *Bad Wolf's* Game Station featured a horrifically twisted version of the show, presided over by an Android Davina McCall.

Amongst the various caricatures of your stereotypical housemate, most of which you can work out within five minutes of sitting down to watch the parent programme, was the Doctor, three regenerations on from the horrors of a planet on which state executions are televised and indeed seemingly packaged as some terrible form of entertainment for sadists who like that sort of thing, one of whom (Sil) happens to be a talking poo, and a deterrent to anyone who might be thinking of going against the status quo.

More's the pity then that the Doctor just can't seem to find a plunger big enough to flush him with. For as well as being possibly the nastiest recorded example of faeces-kind, he's a businessman! Almost like Alan Sugar on *The Apprentice*, Sil proves himself quick to spot the chance to combine profit with pleasure.

SIL: *You are not a rich planet. Zeiton is all*

you have to sell.

GOVERNOR: *There are other exports. We're expanding into entertainments and communications with some success.*

SIL: *How?*

GOVERNOR: *The Punishment Dome. We sell tapes of what happens there.*

SIL: *Ah, that is enterprising. Your idea, Governor?*

GOVERNOR: *Yes.*

SIL: *Are they very disturbing, these videos you sell?*

GOVERNOR: *They show what befalls those who refuse to obey the orders by which the people of Varos must live.*

SIL: *Torture? Blindness? Executions?*

GOVERNOR: *All the functions of the Punishment Dome are recorded as warnings to miscreants everywhere.*

SIL: *But they entertain as well as instruct?*

GOVERNOR: *You must ask my Chief Officer. He is responsible for ComTec Division product.*

SIL: *I will hope to help organise your sales exports, if you consent to lower your Zeiton price.*

Pass the Toilet Duck!

Next, we might ponder just who could bring themselves to watch such fare. Step forward Arak and Etta, some particularly unpleasant examples of the viewing public in what seems to pre-empt *Gogglebox*, in that you can watch people watching television on television. This evening's viewing?

CHIEF: *For sedition, thought rebellion, and incitement of other rebels to organise, to unionise and to terrorise the workforce of*

Varos, the vote of the people was for your death to take place by laser obliteration. JONDAR: The Governor was to consider my appeal!

CHIEF: *Our Governor bows to the will of his people. As Systems Arbiter and Chief Officer, I confirm that the conditions of the Constitution have been complied with. I*





therefore permit your execution to proceed.
JONDAR: *When will this be, Chief Officer?*
CHIEF: *At eight o'clock. You have ample time to compose yourself for eternity. All of five short minutes.*

Cynical readers may well note that it takes the average *Big Brother* contestant far less time than that to embarrass themselves on camera. When the Doctor finds himself thrust into the media spotlight he faces far worse than the controller of Channel Four, mind!

First there was the Editor, working for the Jagraffess (*The Long Game*). Above them, though, are the Daleks, who will be revealed to have discovered religion and begun worshipping their Emperor - who's got a bit of a god complex about him. Before they can subject the (now comparatively starkly dressed, considering the Technicolor Dreamcoat he wore three incarnations previously) Doctor to their version of *Songs of Praise*, he must escape small-screen hell...

LYNDA: *Oh, my God! I don't believe it! Why'd they put you in there? They never said you were coming.*

DOCTOR: *What happened? I was...*

LYNDA: *Careful now. Oh! Oh, mind yourself! Oh, that's the transmat. It scrambles your head. I was sick for days. All right? So, what's your name then, sweetheart?*

DOCTOR: *The Doctor, I think. I was, er. I don't know, what happened? How...*

LYNDA: *You got chosen.*

DOCTOR: *Chosen for what?*

LYNDA: *You're a housemate. You're in the house. Isn't that brilliant?!*

Actually, no it isn't. "**You are live on Channel Forty Four Thousand. Please do not swear.**" Popularity seems to be the one thing that matters to the airheads of the house, proof positive that some things never change! It has to be better

than George Galloway pretending to be a cat for Rula Lenska in the real-world celebrity equivalent though, right?

LYNDA: *I know you're not supposed to talk about the outside world, but you must've been watching. Do people like me? Lynda. Lynda with a 'Y', not Linda with an 'l'. She got forcibly evicted because she damaged the camera. Am I popular?*

DOCTOR: *I don't remember.*

LYNDA: *Oh, but does that mean I'm nothing? Some people get this far just because they're insignificant. Doesn't anybody notice me?*

DOCTOR: *No, you're, you're nice. You're*

sweet. Everybody thinks you're sweet.
LYNDA: *Oh, is that right? Is that what I am? Oh, no one's ever told me that before. Am I sweet? Really?*
DOCTOR: *Yeah. Dead sweet.*
LYNDA: *Thank you.*

And just like today's media, branding is everything.

DOCTOR: *Hold on. I've been here before. This is Satellite Five. No guards. That makes a change. You'd think a big business like Satellite Five would be armed to the teeth.*

LYNDA: *No one's called it Satellite Five in ages. It's the Game Station now. Hasn't been Satellite Five in about a hundred years.*

DOCTOR: *A hundred years exactly. It's the year two zero zero one zero zero. I was here before, Floor one three nine. The Satellite was broadcasting news channels back then. Had a bit of trouble upstairs. Nothing too serious. Easy. Gave them a hand, home in time for tea.*

In that hundred years, the Dalek Emperor has been busy as station controller.

"Well, there's ten floors of Big Brother. There's a different House behind each of those doors. And then beyond that, there's all sorts of shows. It's non-stop. There's Call My Bluff, with real guns. Countdown, where you've got thirty seconds to stop the bomb going off. Ground Force, which is a nasty one. You get turned into compost. Er, Wipeout, speaks for itself. Oh, and Stars In Their Eyes. Literally, stars in their eyes. If you don't sing, you get blinded."

Perhaps best to stick to BBC One? ✦





LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X



I'd been building up a list of TV series to watch after I'd sorted my life out a bit - which always takes a little longer than planned. 2014 and 2015 have produced some amazing shows with amazing female character representation, so the list grew to be pretty long after that much time. I've managed to catch up with *The 100*, the post-nuclear-apocalypse sci-fi series following Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor)'s role as matriarch within a team of unruly criminals. On a rather different note, I've also been watching the cartoon *Steven Universe*, a show in which the main character, Steven, has three mother figures with super powers helping him discover his hidden powers kicking ass. Children's cartoons have always been up there with the most progressive television shows, somehow. And now, *Sense8* has been added to the list - there are just too many great things to watch.

I won't recite the whole list, don't worry. But it was certainly a struggle, trying to decide what to talk about this issue. However, after much consideration, despite the fact that it finished a while ago, I figured *Agent Carter* deserved some love this time round.

For those who've heard about it but don't really know what the fuss is all about - the show focuses on Peggy Carter, Captain America's "best girl" and fellow soldier during World War II and the battle against Hydra. After Steve Rogers (Captain America) is lost in a plane crash - which

will lead to his eventual resurrection in the 21st century - Carter moves on, serving as a detective in New York City, or, at least, she does her best considering how little faith her male co-workers have in her abilities, as a woman. So, when her friend Howard Stark ends up being framed, she takes matters into her own hands, and none of the men in her office suspect a thing - after all, who would expect a woman to solve the case by herself?

Agent Carter really doesn't mess around when addressing the inherent sexism during the 1940s. As a single woman working in a completely male

environment - and on top of that, one who was rumoured to have been dating Captain America - you can imagine how few people take her seriously. Rather than being asked to join the team going into the field, or help investigating, she's asked to take the lunch orders. And her connection to Howard Stark is immediately considered romantic, unreliable, because she'd harboured feelings for Captain America in the past; because any relationship between a man and a woman has to be romantic.

In other words, Peggy Carter represents what many working women



See? A girl can have the best outfit ever and make you beg for your life.

I know I'm late on the uptake, but, guys, have you seen Marvel's *Agent Carter*?

still face to this day. True, gender equality has come leaps and bounds since the 1940s, but women still deal with unequal pay, sexual harassment, male co-workers considering their femininity and 'emotionalism' a hindrance, and a general lack of respect. If you don't believe me, all you need to do is look up UCL's Sir Tim Hunt, who noted the 'difficulty' of having women working in science labs with men. Apparently, we fall in love with co-workers and cry too much.

If Peggy could see how little had changed, she probably *would* cry. And who wouldn't, after seeing the level of prejudice that remains after so many years?

And then she'd most likely threaten to do something *really* unpleasant to Tim Hunt.

Anyway - Peggy is a fantastic role model for women who face this sort of prejudice. She uses the fact that her co-workers underestimate her to get away with solving a case behind their backs. So, ladies- you might not get the respect or money you deserve, but goddamn, you can prove to your male colleagues, and more importantly yourself, that you are *just as brilliant*, if not more so.

Peggy does all the kick-ass stuff that a good hero does, which is awesome. But, to me, what's even better is that she also does the things that a woman would *realistically* do with that power: she puts sexist assholes in their place. For example, when she notices a male customer harassing her waitress friend, she tells him:

"Just so we're clear, this is pressed into your brachial artery. It may be dull, but I'm determined. Keep smiling. Once you start to bleed, you'll lose consciousness in fifteen seconds. You'll die in ninety unless someone comes to your aid. Now, given your recent behaviour, how likely do you think that is to happen? To prevent this not entirely unfortunate event from occurring, I suggest you find a new place to eat. Do we understand each other?"

I don't know about you, but if I were a superhero, I'd be ridding the streets of sexism, too. Amongst other things, of course, but mainly the sexism thing.

If you've read my previous feature, you'll see that there are some areas in which Marvel may have dropped the ball with its representation of female characters - but they got Peggy right on the money. Peggy is fantastic proof that a girl can be girly *and* catch the bad guy. She can wear fabulous red lipstick and have an amazing wardrobe whilst holding



Dugan: What would Cap say if I left his best girl behind? Peggy: He'd say, "Do as Peggy says"!

a villain at gunpoint. Too many female characters these days are masculinised to make them appear stronger - Peggy proves that there is nothing weak about being a girl.

And we can't praise Peggy without giving a shout out to Hayley Atwell herself, the wonderful actress who plays our favourite 1940s crime-fighter. Atwell's Twitter is something sent from heaven - she uses her fame and the adoration of her fans to spread feminist wisdom. She's basically Marvel's Beyoncé.



See?

Now, the show has had its complaints. I know, I know - it sounds just about perfect, doesn't it? 1940s superhero feminism? How on Earth could something so perfect be improved? Well, it's been noted that the show doesn't have enough racial and LGBT+ diversity. A rather anachronistic suggestion, perhaps? Well, it turns out, not so much. Back in the 1940s, there was plenty of LGBT action going on behind the scenes - after all, it's not as if the idea of not being straight was only invented a couple of decades ago, it's

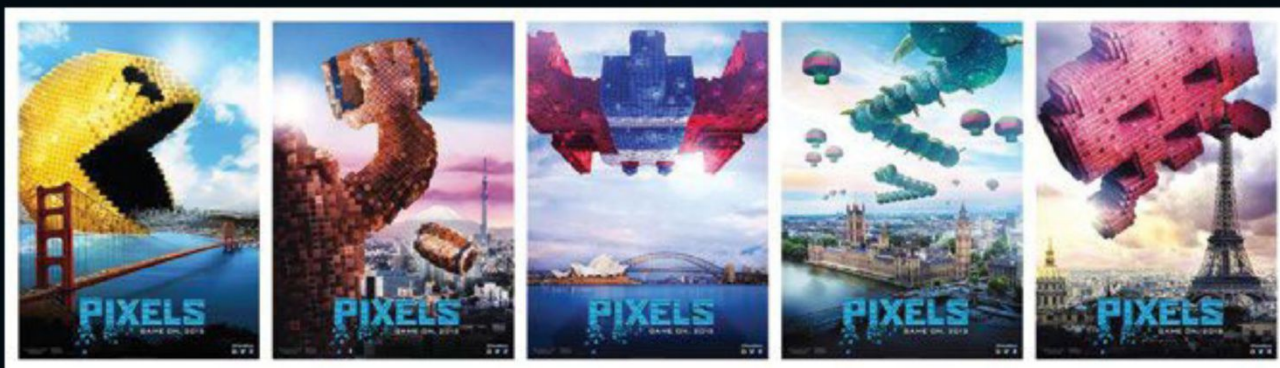
just that no one spoke about it. Equally, there was racial diversity during this time - but, again, no one spoke about them as much, because they weren't considered as much a part of society.

So, maybe next season these things will be introduced into the show. Atwell seems to support the idea - in fact, she's all for Peggy having a romantic relationship with her next door neighbour, Angie. Well, a lot of the fans are certainly up for it, even if we're still mourning over Peggy losing Steve.

It's amazing - or should I say, comforting - how few people seem to complain about the show. About the fact that Peggy isn't a buff guy with super powers, or that the show has so many female leads. It hasn't had really that many viewers, it seems - in fact the show appeared to be in danger for a while. But it wasn't getting reams of hate mail, like we saw when the *Ghostbusters* reboot was announced. So, thank you, viewers, for not being rude and getting it cancelled, because this show is seriously important for female Marvel fans, or anyone watching the show, really. It shows girls that, even amongst the prejudiced, we can still be the best. She's a great role model for anyone, regardless of gender.

So, everybody, with that in mind, whenever you're in a difficult situation, just ask yourself - What Would Peggy Do? ✦

AGENT CARTER is now being shown in the UK on FOX UK.



IT COULD BE THE SURPRISE HIT OF THE YEAR. AS ALIENS ATTACK IN THE FORM OF ICONIC VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS. COULD **PIXELS** BE THE FILM TO CHANGE ADAM SANDLER'S RUN OF TERRIBLE MOVIES?

ATTACK THE

BY DOMINIC CUTHBERT

Despite the technical proficiency and mind-boggling complexity of the current generation of gaming technology, there's still a shared yearning for past glories. Retro fever continues in earnest, with the eighties still fondly remembered by those that lived through it, and for those that didn't with a kind of wide-eyed curiosity and desire. Already we've seen the nostalgia-inducing and tear-jerking *Wreck-It Ralph*, and people are obviously ravenous for more, with the *Pixels* trailer racking up record views for Sony. Pac-Man turned 35 this year, so reminiscing alone will fill up screenings for the upcoming video game themed invasion movie, even if the rest of the film has nothing else going for it.

Adapted from the 2010 short of the same name from French filmmaker Patrick Jean, and spearheaded by director Chris Columbus (the first two *Harry Potter* films), *Pixels* is a film that damns itself with its top billed cast. It stars Adam Sandler, Vince Vaughn and Kevin James. Blimey, not even the presence of Peter Dinklage can negate that much reverse talent. Sandler and James, though, do have a nasty habit of earning big bucks at the Box Office despite their films all receiving a cutthroat critical panning, whether it's the repugnant *Grown Ups* or the just plain offensive *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry*. The supporting cast does boast enough strong players to keep things largely balanced, with Ashley Benson as Lady Lisa, the scantily clad warrior from *Dojo Quest* who's curiously fully fleshed with not a pixel in sight; Jane

Krakovski as the First Lady; Brian Cox as Admiral Porter; Sean Bean, bizarrely, as an Army General and, in very awkward scenes, Denis Akiyama as Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani.



Happy Madison, Sandler's own production company, has buddied up with Columbia Pictures to lord over the production, with a script penned by Tim Herlihy and Tim Dowling. Herlihy's writing credits belong exclusively to Sandler flicks, from *Billy Madison* right through to *The Ridiculous Six*, so it's less a love of video games that attracted him to the project and more the cult of Sandler. Where's the poisoned Kool-Aid? Co-writer Dowling's filmography doesn't bode much better, being one of the writers behind *Role Models* and

the dreadful *This Means War*. Though a co-writing credit on Joe Nussbaum's delightful 1999 short *George Lucas in Love* proves Dowling does know a thing or two about geek culture and, crucially, playful humour.

Surprising no one, Hollywood has juiced up the source material, squeezing out all sense of charm and wit and leaving only the pulp. Instead of pixelated attackers pouring from an old discarded TV set, it pairs the impending doom and extra-terrestrial iniquities of *Independence Day* with the over-the-top mega destruction of *Armageddon*. Where the original short was a satisfying, well-shot and genuinely funny two and a half minutes with an unhappy ending to boot, the feature-length is, well, you've seen the trailer. Its greatest strength looks set to be



clocking as much mulleted Dink-time as possible. Cynicism aside (for the moment, at least) the very fact *Pixels* exists is testament to the lasting legacy of these loveable arcade avatars. Who'd have thought that Pac-Man and Donkey Kong would become the universal cultural icons they are?

Aliens invading by way of video game characters is a novel idea, though one that *Futurama* has already excelled at in the episode *Anthology of Interest II*. In the segment *Raiders of the Lost Arcade*, video game characters, dubbed Nintendians and led by Donkey Kong himself, invade and it falls on Fry, himself a whizz at the arcades, and a team of gaming experts to save Earth. *Pixels*, on the other hand, ponders that in 1982, NASA shot a time capsule into space, containing touchstones of our society and culture, including the boom in video games, in the fleeting hope of contacting alien life. These

(Adam Sandler), alongside Centipede master Ludlow Lamonsoff (Josh Gad) and Donkey Kong king Eddie 'The Fire Blaster' Plant (Peter Dinklage). They're joined by weapons specialist Lt. Col. Violet Van Patten (Michelle Monaghan in a role originally considered for Jennifer Aniston), who supplies them with unique speciality guns designed to fight the invaders. Even from the trailer, you can see the glib 'girl gamer' joke tittering on ad infinitum. Though perhaps more annoyingly, can't a tech-savvy and trigger happy woman just exist as her own character? Nope, she has to be Sandler's unfortunate love interest.

It doles out all the nerd tropes à la *Big Bang Theory*, with Gad's character a conspiracy-obsessed whizz kid with terrible social skills. Then there's the arrogant Dinklage character, decked out like *Dog the Bounty Hunter*, and Sandler's own slacker character resting on his



PIXELS



classic characters are indeed received by aliens and taken as a declaration of war, with Pac-Man representing an all-consuming Earth, while the ghosts are gobbled-up alien worlds. There's plenty of globalisation and consumerism-based satire to be gleaned from that idea, but it seems unlikely the film will plumb these depths. The aliens respond in kind by sending down real life counterparts of these characters, who wreak bloody havoc on humanity by way of retaliation, turning everything in their path into a scattered mass of pixels.

In desperation, president Will Cooper (played by Kevin James... no really) calls in a group of real gaming nerds and arcade wizards, who were at the top of their game in the early eighties, to counter the threat. The team is headed up by Cooper's childhood best friend and Pac-Man world champion Sam Brenner

glory days. Instead of being relatable and wistful presences, the characters end up as trite stand-ins to take the piss and poke fun. It's a story where no one in positions of power spent time playing video games, no, that's just a pastime for deadbeats and weirdos. Are we to believe that out of America's entire military force, that there's none who are any good at video games? With weepy homages to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and slapstick, shouting and stereotype coddling aplenty, it's doubtful whether this is the film you were looking for. It's easy to get blindsided by the nostalgia, but *Pixels* looks set to be just another Sandler vehicle, given his vast involvement, and that usually means the tired, oft offensive humour that comes with him will be there by the bucket load.

Pixels might end up being a case of box office numbers, while offending the most eagerly awaiting part of its market in the process. It's unlikely that any of the humour will be handled with subtlety or acumen. Instead, it looks set to do what's expected and use these infamous gaming icons to bolster special effects and reap the financial rewards. After all, a lot of childhood memories hang in the balance here. When in doubt, there's still the original short or that *Futurama* episode to while away the ache. But in the unlikely event that *Pixels* proves to be a hit with the gaming community, filled with sly nods and pithy tributes to the arcade generation, do ignore all of the above.

Get your game on as *PIXELS* lands in cinemas on August 12th.



Three years after his stylish and haunting take on the Daphne du Maurier short story *Don't Look Now*, cinematographer-turned-director Nicolas Roeg followed it up with a sprawling science fiction fable of human excess, avarice and corruption. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* straddles the netherworld between reverence and obscurity, where its power still holds court with filmmakers, though it remains largely underappreciated and misunderstood.

Based on the 1963 novel of the same name by American author Walter Tevis, *TMWFTE* (as we'll refer to it from hereon in) told the story of extraterrestrial Thomas Jerome Newton, who's desperately trying to get his parched planet's people to Earth's aqua. This served as the basis for the movie, but it took several narrative dovetails, not least in allegory and exposition. Where the novel provides explanations for Newton's afflictions and strangeness, the film makes no concession and lets its weird locks out, leaving much unsaid and ambiguous. Tevis' novel was far

more political in nature than Roeg's dreamily muddled movie (it saw the Republicans and Democrats have it out), but both agree on Newton as a martyred figure. In the film, which eclipsed the success of the novel, Newton patents unique technology in an attempt to fund and build a spacecraft home. This new tech drastically changes the world, with Newton becoming a corporate playboy in the process, almost overtaking America's largest conglomerates. Having built his ship, he's accosted by corporate America and its government and made to endure a series of experiments. Newton is undone, exploited, and his genius and alien standing ultimately controlled, but his fall from grace is due in no small part to his own vices, which by the film's close have become dependencies.

David Bowie won the Saturn Award for Best Actor for his captivating performance as the androgynous and angelic Newton (named after Isaac Newton, being one of many motifs of falling throughout the film), in his first feature film role. The story goes that Roeg was enthralled by

the 1975 Bowie profile *Cracked Actor* and, despite his lack of film experience, Bowie was exactly what the director was looking for in his upcoming project. Indeed, the character of Newton was in command of many of the subtleties and qualities that Bowie himself was portraying in the profile, an enigmatic and cerebral being that, for lack of a better word, seemed alien. At this time, Bowie was touring Diamond Dogs across America, and the narrative drew many parallels with the trajectory of Bowie's career and his feeling of being a foreign body in the US. The similarities were beyond coincidence. It was a match made in heaven - or the cosmos, at least.

A meeting between the filmmaker and rock star was scheduled at Bowie's swanky New York apartment, but Bowie had all but forgotten the meet and greet, remembering only four hours after the agreed time. When he finally turned up, Roeg was still there, a picture of patience, confident that only Bowie was the man for the job. After this clash of creative titans, he signed on for the film without

STARMAN

By
Dominic
Cuthbert

Join us and take a look back at a seminal sci-fi oddity from the seventies, as we examine **THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH...**



even reading the script. While he had been offered numerous film roles throughout the previous year, they were made up mostly of shoddy exploitation flicks. Then along came Roeg, a serious filmmaker with an avant garde chiller, a metaphysical adventure and a co-directing credit on the Mick Jagger vehicle *Performance* in his filmography, and all Bowie would have to do is be himself. He has gone on record and spoken of the chemistry between himself and Roeg, a mutual and jovial understanding. While *THWTFE* has plenty going for it, Bowie's sensuous performance is the lynchpin and without it, well, it's unlikely we'd be talking about the film all these decades later.

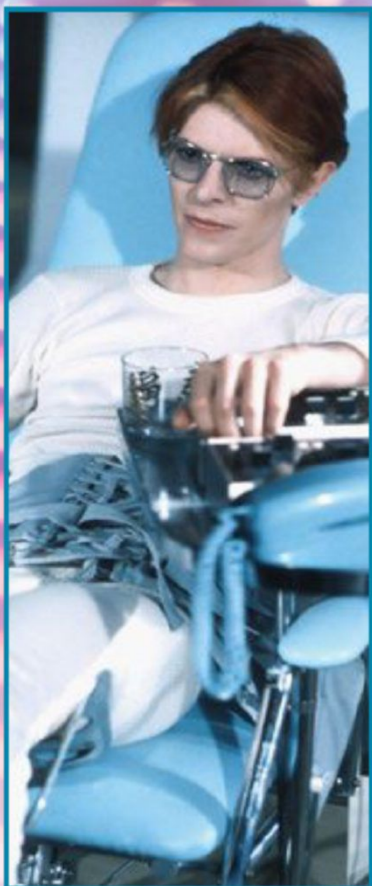
But it wasn't all about Bowie. Roeg's then-girlfriend and *American Graffiti* actress Candy Clark took on the role of Mary-Lou, chambermaid and all round handy-woman at a slapdash hotel. She's lonely, disadvantaged, naïve and captivated by Newton, as the two of them form an intimate relationship and she introduces him to the joys of sex, gin, and television. Clark is able to

convey need and sensuality with an air of commonality, and her development into Newton's carnal casualty and a woman ravaged by time and alcohol is a remarkable transformation. She's at first overshadowed by Bowie's presence, but props him up with the nuances of her own performance. Rip Torn, likewise, adds to the richness of the acting as the lecherous seducer of his nubile students, and there's even a cameo appearance from Apollo 13 spacecraft commander Jim Lovell.

Roeg is an abstract creator, finding meaning by marrying theme and images in a distinctive style, allowing precise patterns to form onscreen and in the viewer's mind. *THWTFE* employs his infamously idiosyncratic editing style, where seemingly random asides that puncture the idea of linear narrative and traditional storytelling flesh out a mesmerising filmic experience. It was an approach that worked beautifully on *Don't Look Now* as a series of lingering flash-forwards and haunting foreshadowing. Roeg takes this a step further on his sci-fi outing, with flourishes of surreal and

nonsensical imagery, culminating in a heady film that's difficult to make head or tail of, though it's far from impenetrable or accidental. He revealed in 1999 that his intention with the film was to remove any sense of time, noting how preoccupied with it we are in everyday life. In the pensive slur of images and ideas, it's evident that the events are linked by an abstract otherness rather than the passing of time, with decades passing in seconds and Newton never visibly ageing.

On the subject of time, the film isn't short at two and half hours, but watching it feels more like an experience than simply something to while away the time. But based on a test screening, *THWTFE*'s American distributor Donald Rugoff trimmed the film by twenty minutes, and even then he felt this was pushing it, going so far as to propose a prologue to beg audience indulgence. Needless to say Roeg wasn't happy, and the film has subsequently been released in a variety of formats in its full and uncut iteration. The narrative is enigmatic, but cutting out some of the more surreal turns won't help impatient cinema goers. It



requires plenty of work on the viewer's part, and the experience can be a deeply personal one. It's allegorical and philosophical and, more often than not, baffling. Even scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg wasn't much interested in logic or continuity.

Having distributed *Don't Look Now*, Paramount Pictures agreed to put up \$1.5m for *TMWFTE*, marking Roeg's biggest budget to date. Prolific producer Michael Deeley used this to fully finance the film. Production was scheduled for 11 weeks and began in early July 1975, predominantly in and around New Mexico, with the interiors filmed at Surrey's Shepperton Studios. But the shoot hardly went smoothly. The cameras would often jam for no apparent reason, Hell's Angels interrupted the scene on an Aztec burial ground, and Bowie fell ill after drinking some funky milk (to this day, no one knows what the dodgy substance floating in the lactose was). Bowie was also using cocaine during the production, snorting up to 10 grams a day, to the extent that he had little memory of the shoot. On the plus side, the gaunt and emaciated look

worked wonders for his portrayal of the humanoid Newton. He even allegedly had a hankering for ice cream throughout the shoot, so much so he needed to be dissuaded from eating it as he was piling on the pounds. Paramount Pictures' Barry Diller reportedly refused to pay for the film after he saw the finished article, citing differences to what the studio had envisioned. UK distributor British Lion responded by suing Paramount, sparking a small coup and receiving an appropriately small settlement. With the help of a measly US release via Cinema Vin and foreign sales, the film just managed to scrape back its budget.

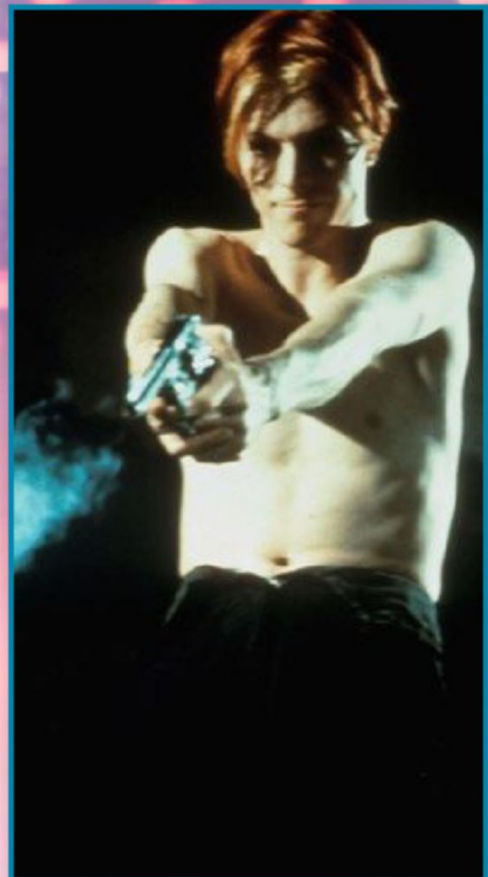
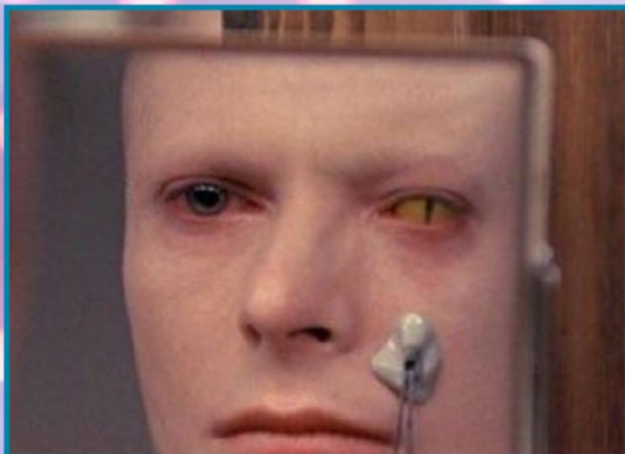
The soundtrack is often disruptive, and proves to be one of the more dated aspects of the film. Bowie ended up writing several songs for the film, one of which, the ethereal, pointedly spacey Brian Eno collaboration *Subterraneans*, went on to feature on *Low*. He began recording bits of both *Low* and *Station to Station* during this time. In the end, Roeg went for a score by Japanese composer Stomu Yamashta, overseen by musical

coordinator and former Mamas and the Papas leader John Phillips. In 1977, Bowie sent a copy of *Low* to Roeg, with a note that said this was what he wanted for the film. Even the sleeve is based on the film poster, with Bowie still very much in Newton mode.

TMWFTE is difficult to interpret, or to single out any consecutive, lasting meaning. It's an enigma, like its central character and the rock star portraying him. It satirises the excess and avarice of American culture and, by extension, human beings, seen from the point of view of that most reliable of outsiders, the alien. Whatever your own interpretation, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is a lasting melange of impressive imagery, and a master class in editing. It remains distinctly on the periphery of time, sense and fashion, and we'd have it no other way.



You can catch *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* on HORROR CHANNEL – available through SKY 319, VIRGIN 149, FREEVIEW 70, FREESAT 138 – on August 9th at 9pm.



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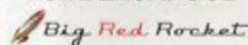
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And Now For Someone Completely Omnipotent

BY KIERON MOORE



If you were granted incredible superpowers, would you use them for good? Really? That's the question asked of **SIMON PEGG** in the latest film from **TERRY JONES**.

The Monty Python team and Simon Pegg together. Need we say more? Oh alright, we will anyway. One of the more intriguing comedies of this coming summer, *Absolutely Anything* sees Terry Jones, he who helmed the three classic Monty Python films we all know and love, return to the director's chair for the first time in nearly 20 years. From a script by Jones and Gavin Scott (of *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* fame), what's particularly exciting about *Absolutely Anything* is that, as well as starring Britain's current favourite comedy leading man, it brings all the surviving Pythons – Jones, Terry Gilliam, John Cleese, Eric Idle, and Michael Palin – back together for their first film since 1983's *The Meaning of Life* – albeit in voice form only.



A Spacefaring Circus

The Pythons voice a gang of power-crazed aliens whose attention is turned to planet Earth when the Voyager space probe wanders into intergalactic territory. In order to decide whether or not to destroy our planet, the aliens grant one member of its population the superpower to do, well, absolutely anything – if this person uses the power for good, Earth gets to live. If not, it'll kick the bucket, shuffle off its mortal coil, and become an ex-Earth. Enter Neil Clarke (Pegg), a disillusioned teacher in a failing school, who one day discovers that he can command his dog's turds to clean themselves up. The question is – will he choose to become a messiah, or is he a very naughty boy?

It's a great concept, a sort of British, atheist *Bruce Almighty*, with potential for all sorts of typically Pythonesque nonsense. With the tagline "With Great Power Comes Total Irresponsibility", it appears that Neil at first uses his powers to his own gain – improving certain aspects of his physique, spying on the girl next door, and giving his dog the ability to talk. But at some point, he comes round to using his powers for good, though not always to the best effect – he wishes for everyone who died to be alive again, for example, and ends up with a zombie apocalypse on his hands. Lucky Simon Pegg has experience dealing with that sort of thing.



Comedy, Love, and a Bit with a Dog

It's not just the Pythons and Mr. Pegg who are of interest in this film, however. Neil's talking dog Dennis is voiced by none other than the late Robin Williams, in his final film role. Perhaps unsurprisingly to anyone who owns a dog, it turns out Dennis' main interests in life are biscuits and sex, as Neil finds out when Dennis won't shut up about them. Though we've all seen the talking animal trope before, Williams' performance combined with Jones' dialogue could well make Dennis' scenes the comic highlights of the film.

Also showing up are Kate Beckinsale (*Underworld*, *Total Recall*) as Neil's love interest Catherine, Rob Rigg (21 *Jump Street*, *The Hangover*) as an American Colonel who's a rival for Catherine's affections, and Eddie Izzard, the British comedian who's recently been seen in *Hannibal* and *Powers*, as Neil's headmaster boss. There are also appearances from Sanjeev Bhaskar, Meera Syal and Joanna Lumley.

Journey to the Screen

But while you'll be able to see this cast in action this summer, *Absolutely Anything* has actually been in development for quite some time. Inspired by the H. G. Wells story *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, Jones and Scott have been working on the script for around twenty years – in fact, it's so old that Douglas Adams once gave Jones his thoughts on it!

It finally launched into pre-production around 2010, after executive producer Mike Medavoy asked Jones what scripts he had tucked away; at this point, John Oliver (who you may know from *Community* or his US talk show) was attached to star, along with Williams, Cleese, Palin and Gilliam, but it floundered in development. It wasn't until Pegg signed up in late 2013, presumably taking over Oliver's role, that the project finally started moving forward. Shortly after, Eric Idle joined his fellow Pythons (around the same time as they were preparing for their big reunion show of summer 2014) and the decades-old script, suitably adapted for a modern audience, finally went into production.

Absolutely Any Good?

So, with *Absolutely Anything* about to reach cinemas at last, is it set to be one of the can't-miss films of the summer? It's got a unique concept and a very strong roster of comedians on its cast list, plus the prospect of seeing (well, hearing) the Pythons together again is undeniably exciting.

On the other hand, with them only appearing in voice form, and with only one Python having had a hand in the script, not forgetting the difficulty Jones would inevitably face trying to get a film with quite the anarchy of classic Python produced today, it may be too optimistic to hope we have another *Life of Brian* on our hands.

But, hey, it's the Monty Python team back together, Simon Pegg rarely goes wrong, and we'd love Robin Williams' final film to be a good one. So we're optimistic – you could say we're choosing to look on the bright side of life...

ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING
will be released on August 14th.



PYTHONS IN SPACE

ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING sees Terry Jones and his old crew voicing a gang of alien meanies, but here are a few other times when the Pythons have crossed over with the sci-fi/fantasy genre...



LIFE OF BRIAN (1979)

In a typically ludicrous moment (and brilliant example of *deus ex machina*) from the Pythons' take on the Biblical epic, accidental messiah Brian, while being chased by Romans, falls to his certain death only to land conveniently in a passing alien spaceship. The aliens fly out into space, are chased by an enemy craft, get shot down, and crash right at the bottom of the tower Brian fell from. He climbs out unscathed. Lucky bastard, indeed.



BRAZIL (1985)

Of all the Pythons, it's Terry Gilliam who's made the biggest mark in the world of cinema, having gone on to direct several movies of his own. His most intriguing is perhaps *Brazil*, a dystopian satire in which Orwell's 1984 meets Python-style slapstick. See also: *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) and *Time Bandits* (1981), which starred John Cleese as Robin Hood.



THE GALAXY SONG

First heard in *The Meaning of Life* (1983), this musical number reappeared in 1991's *Monty Python Sings* album and in the 2014 stage show. After a woman refuses to donate her liver, Eric Idle climbs out of her fridge in a fetching pink suit and takes her on a tour of outer space, singing about the vastness of the universe. The 2014 version is followed by a sketch featuring Brian Cox pointing out the song's inaccuracies only to be knocked over by Stephen Hawking, who then sings it himself.



THE "SCIENCE FICTION SKETCH"

A 1969 episode of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* gave us a series of sketches forming this brilliant parody of TV sci-fi serials. When the English start mysteriously turning into Scotsmen, a conspiracy by alien blancmanges to win Wimbledon is discovered. Worth searching out, both for the razor-sharp deconstruction of sci-fi character tropes and for the sight of a giant jelly playing tennis.



DIE ANOTHER DAY (2002)

Bringing to an end his brief run as Q, John Cleese presents James Bond with an invisible car – one of those moments where the 007 series gave up with the grounded spy thriller shtick and wandered into sci-fi territory, to, well, mixed reception.

THERE IS NO ESCAPE!

by John Townsend

The infected are out for blood in NIGHTMARE CITY, a schlocky Italian horror from 1980. We look into why the film has been unearthed for modern fans...



In the late 1970s and early 1980s, zombies were the go-to monsters for the socially conscious filmmaker with something to say. Between George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978 and his trilogy-completing *Day of the Dead* in 1985, there were more than 40 films of note released that featured the undead in various forms; and that list doesn't include independent, micro-budget movies that may have emerged at the time. Within that period, recognised classics such as John Carpenter's *The Fog*, Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* and Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2*, (or *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, if you're in the UK) entertained and terrified audiences in equal measure. There is one film from this period from hugely prolific Italian filmmaker Umberto Lenzi that has for more than three decades since its release remained something of an enigma, though; adored by devotees but unheard of by many film fans. That film is *Nightmare City*.

When American news reporter Dean Miller (Hugo Stiglitz) is sent to the airport to interview a scientist about a nuclear accident, he could not have foreseen how his day would pan out. Dozens of infected humans pour from the plane with a taste for blood, and the city's residents are powerless to stem the tide of gnashing, snarling ghouls.

Whenever Italian cinema of the period is discussed, it is done so with the names of Mario Bava, Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento foremost in people's minds. The period is famous for the giallo movement, a style of filmmaking that takes its name

from the yellow pages of the popular pulp novels first published in 1929 that are now a synonym for mystery-inspired stories. Lenzi will always be associated with this genre but never received the prestige bestowed on his peers, perhaps due to his slight reticence at being connected with horror at all. Lenzi's preference was for war films and for westerns; for the police crime films he made in abundance; but he is best known as one of the 'founders' of the so-called cannibal movement. *Man from Deep River* in 1972 gave impetus to the subgenre, but it was not until Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (also one of the first 'found footage' films) that the series really gained notoriety. Perhaps second only to Deodato's controversial masterpiece was Lenzi's most famous film, *Cannibal Ferox*, which was released in 1981. Before that in 1980, though, Lenzi made *Nightmare City*, a film that slipped under the radar slightly at the time due to poor reviews and unconvincing effects. Today, this hugely nostalgic feature is still one of the lesser-known entries in the canon but those clever people at Arrow Films have chosen this little seen, yet hugely influential work for restoration and a shiny new Blu-ray is set for release. The process has not been an easy one though.

"*Nightmare City* is a special case really," explains James White who supervises the restoration process at Arrow Films. "Essentially, the film was challenging because the state of the materials was so



compromised and it has to do with how they've been restored for years or badly treated in the lab environment or by the distributor. You never really know how the damage occurred to the element but digital restoration can only achieve so much despite how far it has come and there is a point where you have to stop or the film becomes something completely different."

If the film was barely of a condition to restore it then, why do so?

James continues, "It's from Umberto Lenzi who was an important director of the time and *Nightmare City* is definitely one of his lesser known films. It's the kind of film that fans of it adore, and while perhaps not a favourite of the genre, it is a lot of fun. It's rude, crude, graphic and gory and some of the effects are easy to see but it's fun if not for everyone. We wanted to do the best we could for the film then for the people who love it."

This is essentially the point. *Nightmare City*, when compared to many of the zombie films of the era, is considerably more frivolous and lightweight in its narrative and message, although the latter still exists. Instead of an infection or disease, Lenzi chose nuclear radiation as the source of his outbreak, and actually railed against his 'mutants' ever being called zombies in the first place. The creatures that spread through the city need blood due their own bodies being unable to regenerate red blood cells, rather than just killing for killing's sake. They also seem to possess superhuman strength and abilities and frustratingly, Lenzi never tries to explain how they can be stopped, preferring instead to include an ambiguous ending that questions whether the events actually took place or not. The military also fare badly in *Nightmare City*, being depicted as deeply flawed and unwilling to accept those failings. Lenzi makes a point of emphasising the military leaders' reluctance to alert the public, preferring in their ignorance to allow casualties rather than adapt to the situation and try to contain the spread of the mutants. Anti-nuclear and anti-military messages are clear, but they are still secondary to the exuberance and fun to be found in the film.

A modern day comparison closer to *Nightmare City* rather than the multitude of true zombie horrors is Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*. Boyle's baddies are infected with the rage virus rather than being irradiated, but they share one characteristic that continues to divide genre fans: they are fast. For this development alone, *Nightmare City*

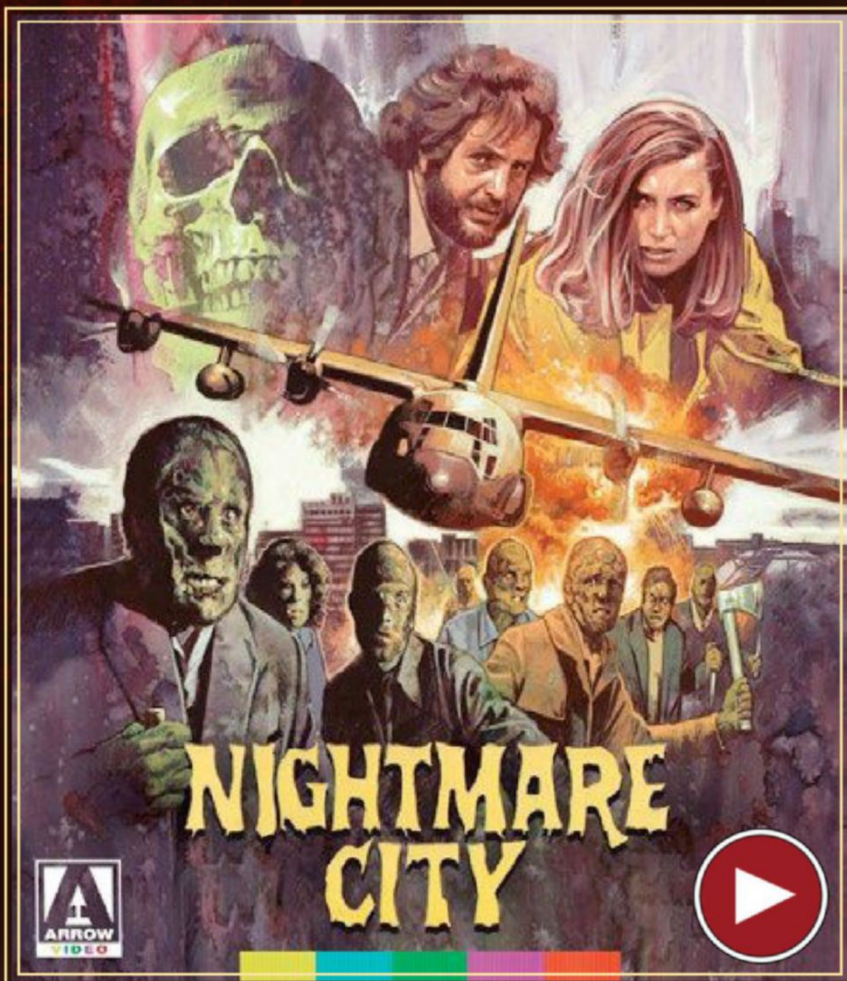
retains a place in history as its influence can clearly be seen on numerous films, from the aforementioned *28 Days Later* to the recent *World War Z*, where the infected creatures swarm and sprint their way through the cities. There are even fast zombies in Zack Snyder's Romero remake *Dawn of the Dead*!

How much you enjoy *Nightmare City* will be determined entirely by how you approach it. It is ridiculous. It has a central premise and plot that make little sense and the effects are unconvincing to the point that in some scenes you can virtually see the tape holding everything together. The female characters are about as hideously shallow as they could be and the mutated humans themselves are very strange indeed. But it is impossible to ignore the fact that the film is a whole lot of fun. The

overacting is wickedly infectious and the blood flows freely as the city is taken over one building at a time.

As a horror film of the time, *Nightmare City* will always suffer by comparison but it still remains one of the most important due to Lenzi's decision to have fast, irradiated mutants as his antagonists rather than the lumbering zombies of so many other films. He replaced the sense of impending dread with a faster, more instant fear and for that alone his influence can still be felt in filmmaking. Embrace *Nightmare City* as one of a kind, engage with its failings and enjoy its insanity, and you'll have a huge smile on your face from beginning to end.

The new 2K restoration of *NIGHTMARE CITY* is available on Blu-ray on August 3rd.





By John Townsend

HITMAN: AGENT 47 PREVIEW

As yet another popular video game makes its way to the big screen, STARBURST ponders if HITMAN: AGENT 47 can kill at the Box Office...

What is it with Hollywood and computer game adaptations? No matter how many underwhelming and poorly received films that appear year in year out, the obsession with converting successful video games franchises into feature films remains and shows no sign of slowing down at all. The main reason for this is that the promise of a ready-made audience is irresistible to the greedy Hollywood accountants; *The Last of Us*, considered to be one of the best games of recent years, has sold in excess of 8 million copies and a Sam Raimi-produced film version is reportedly in development. Regardless of any other relevant factors or considerations, those numbers are very, very appealing.

New video game conversions are now greeted with understandable cynicism though. Games players know the risk of being disappointed is high, and yet are compelled to watch anyway. Perhaps if the filmmakers remained more faithful to the complex and intertwining narratives of the games themselves, their products would be received with more enthusiasm, but as long as the audience remains loyal, the films will continue to be made.

So with that positivity in mind we eagerly await the reboot of one of the most enduring and successful video games characters of all time. *Hitman: Agent 47* will hopefully give fans of the franchise a film worthy of the name and from what we can tell at this stage, it actually has a pretty good chance of doing so.

There has of course already been a film version of the shaven-headed, barcoded super-assassin in 2007, which starred Timothy Olyphant and Olga Kurylenko. Despite strangely distancing itself from

much of the mythos created by the games and attempting to create an entirely different background and timeline - while also being critically panned - the film was ultimately a financial success. It would also be fair to say that the many things wrong with that film do not include Olyphant's interpretation, being fairly faithful to the original character, despite the wholesale changes; but no sequel followed. Given that the numbers certainly added up, a reboot of sorts was always likely for a character that is without doubt interesting, and still hugely popular.

And so here we are...

One thing that does initially appear different between *Agent 47* and the earlier film is the scale and ambition demonstrated in the footage we've seen. The new film doesn't seem to be holding back at all on the action, as exploding cars fly through the air and the lead exhibits *Matrix*-like abilities to dodge bullets, all combined with skills that reference the Gun Fu seen predominantly in Hong Kong cinema. If all these ingredients blend well together this could be the film games fans have been crying out for; at the very least, it should be spectacular!



Another interesting thing is Agent 47 utilising the uniform of a recently dispatched police officer in order to escape from a precarious and threatening position. As a staple of the *Hitman* video games, this reference could imply a much closer conversion and also provide fans with a greater connection to the series.

A reason why *Agent 47* could work is the assembled cast. Initially including the late Paul Walker, it's now led by British actor Rupert Friend. It would be fair to say he is better known for less physical roles, being most recently seen in *Homeland*, and as the tightly-wound counsellor in the impressive *Starred Up*. This is Friend's most significant Hollywood role to date, and one that could define the next few years of his career. Deliver a performance that stands out, regardless of the film's success, and further offers will come; fail to convince in any way and another opportunity may be some years away. Helping Friend out is the notable cast, which includes Zachary Quinto (*Star Trek*), Thomas Kretschmann (*Avengers: Age of Ultron*) and Ciarán Hinds (*Game of Thrones* and too many films to list). You would hope that such a collection of actors would not have signed on the dotted line had the script not been up to scratch which provides much hope for the film.

The unavoidable pressure on *Agent 47* isn't relieved by the hiring of first-time feature director Aleksander Bach, whose background is firmly in the advertising market. While there is no justifiable reason to imply scepticism, it's a major film for a debut director, which brings with it a certain amount of expectation. Again, deliver a good version of the character and your career is underway; drop the proverbial ball and back to the small screen you go.



Such is Hollywood's fixation with franchise building that any appearance of bringing one to an end could kill a potentially successful career, so Bach must somehow convert some of the style of his Mercedes Benz adverts to the big screen. At the very least the car chases should look damn good!

An area that is as yet unclear is how sympathetic the *Agent 47* character will be. The official synopsis states that he teams up with a young woman in order to prevent a mega-corporation revealing the secrets of the Agent program. It would appear that said young woman (Hannah Ware, *Oldboy*) is on the run with Quinto's character and pursued by Agent 47. Given the central character is the culmination of years of development (and 46 other failed attempts) in order to make the perfect killing machine, making him at all sympathetic will always be a risk. In the games there is always a goal for the player to achieve that usually involves the assassination of one or more individuals considered more deplorable than an engineered killer, but this is more difficult to achieve on film with real people. How Bach and the writers tackle this little quandary will be interesting to see and could be the key to the film's success or failure.

At a time when some degree of emotional complexity is evident in the majority of Hollywood's big hitters, it may prove revelatory to have a character that is a true anti-hero; one that contains much more shadowy depth than usually seen and one who struggles towards redemption for longer than the usual one act. If Bach can pull all the components together he may succeed in bucking the trend and deliver a film that is not only worthy of the *Hitman* name, but also of video games as a whole.

Catch up with HITMAN: AGENT 47 when it shoots its way into cinemas on August 28th.

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SAY HELLO TO REEL EVIL

by Jack Bottomley

As *SINISTER 2* gets ready to crawl back into cinemas, *STARBURST* recaps the first film and looks at what we might expect next...

When it comes to horror films, many hide their wicked ways behind a fairly tactful title, others think "the hell with it" and set their stall out from the start. Forget the ambiguity, let's get straight to the point: films like *Insidious*, *Alien*, *Psycho* and *Poltergeist*. However much as these one-word-titled wonders may cut the crap when it comes to setting the scene, as some of the above examples show, the movies themselves can still hold many unexpectedly twisting terrors. One such film that seems to have thrived as a memorable modern day mainstream example is *Sinister*. Constantly trailers use *Sinister* as a calling card for producers (that 'from the producers of' tagline is familiar to most regular filmgoers). So with this said, allow *STARBURST* to go back into the attic and dig out the accursed film in question, ahead of its impending sequel.

Leading up to October 2012, Scott Derrickson's (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*) *Sinister* had sunk its hooks into the skin of many audiences with an undeniably intense

marketing campaign. The creepy glimpses of a shadowy antagonist and dark visual jolts were attention grabbing to say the least. The film, penned by Derrickson and C. Robert Cargill, looked at a former star true-crime writer, Ellison Oswalt (played by Ethan Hawke), who moves with his family into a new home and in the attic he stumbles across a box of innocent Super 8 home movies that actually contain horrific snuff films (wouldn't it be a twist if sometime they just contained seaside holidays and a picnic with a nice old aunt). However, the more Ellison digs into these apparent murders, something within the films begins to haunt him and his family creating a... wait for it... *Sinister* series of events (*knowing look at camera*). The film's relatively simple plot was in many ways a blend of Joel Schumacher's *8MM* and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. However, Derrickson and Cargill did not initially set out to make a haunted film (literally). In fact, the original idea was much more ingrained in the nightmarish and child-ensnaring realm of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

The whole film, inspired by a nightmare Cargill once had (after a viewing of 2002 version of *The Ring*), was essentially built up originally as a bogeyman-like story and the admittedly terrifying shadowy Bughuul (meaning eater of children, based on the Babylonian demon tale - which actually came to translate as bogeyman) character (played by Nick King) developed from this central idea. Originally taking the mantle of a Willy Wonka-style (Johnny Depp's version) figure, luring innocent children to

commit devious deeds, the heavy metal-inspired character (actually created by a photographer on Flickr that Derrickson and Cargill bought the rights to) became more of a pagan deity that sat by and watched the kids do his bidding. The original idea did not alter too drastically, but in the end, the film took on a far more 'family haunted by presence' approach; undoubtedly the film's most effective aspect remaining intact. *Sinister* was originally a story about the



SINISTER, 2012



SINISTER 2, 2015

infatuation of evil and the engrossing power of a bogeyman on the innocent young; in fact, the evil Bughuul was originally called Mr Boogie in early drafts (an aspect carried over in the finished film - as the child characters refer to the figure by that name). However, as Derrickson and Cargill crafted the film's story of an investigative mind pushed to breaking point by face-to-face interaction with real evil, *Sinister* became part-murder mystery/part-paranormal chiller.

For all its missteps (and there were a few), *Sinister* lived up to its no nonsense title, opening in memorable fashion, with a Super 8 video of a family hanging - still one of the film's most powerful moments - and continuing that bleak tone throughout, it's little wonder the film freaked out many audiences. There is no doubt that the plot veers off towards the end, as the film takes a final turn for the more outlandish, finishing on the note that Ellison's daughter Ashley (played by Claire Foley) - under the power of the Bughuul and with camera at hand - kills her family and creates her own home film. Then at the closing moments, she's taken into said film by the monstrous entity. It's a way of turning the murder home movies into an evil gateway between the dastardly deeds of the past and present, but as an idea it struggles to nail the same blend of audaciousness and fright that James Wan's *Insidious* did the year before.

That being said, the one thing you can say about *Sinister*, flaws and all, is that its select scares work and sometimes very bloody well. The haunted home video snuff films methodically come to reveal the Bughuul character and in doing so create a series of uncompromisingly scary images in the process. These genuinely Super 8-shot sequences are split into different, troublingly authentic looking, home movies - a drowning (*Pool Party* '66), people burning in a car (*BBQ* '79), people run over by a lawn mower (*Lawn Work* '86), folk having their throats slit in bed (*Sleepy Time* '98), and the film's opening hanging sequence (*Family Hanging Out* '11). In many ways, these home films are the film's greatest achievement and often

overpower the main investigative narrative (which at times gets in the way of the malicious frights). The films are seen as the MacGuffin, but are what really gives *Sinister* its most distinctive moments.

Costing a mere \$3 million to make and going on to scare up a total of \$77.7 million worldwide, which, of course, made the stirrings of a follow-up not exactly a shock. Critics were slightly more mixed, albeit mostly positive as the film scored a respectable 62% on Rotten Tomatoes and was praised for effective scares and moments of diabolical flair, but was criticised for its use of horror clichés and the admittedly improbable behaviour of the characters. Although most horror films do suffer from this at times, come on, who among us would think "oh lets investigate this series of snuff films further?" *Sinister* was a notable success and left the story wrapped up but its antagonist ready to kill again. Henceforth,

the reel started rolling for *Sinister 2*.

Now when you have killed off your main characters, a prequel is often the next logical step. However, *Sinister 2* is not (thankfully) going down that route. The film sees James Ransone return as the deputy that aided Ellison's investigation into the murders in the first film, keeping some sense of continuity, and obviously Nick King returns as the horrifying Bughuul. Derrickson and Cargill write the film once again but the directorial duties have been handed over to Irish writer/director Ciarán Foy (who directed 2012's tower block-set horror *Citadel*). Foy is a relatively new name in the genre and it will be intriguing to see what direction he takes this sequel, as his last film was more psychological in approach. The simple premise is that a mother and her twin sons move into a house that is marked for death... needless to say the Bughuul will be up to his child-manipulating ways again - unless he's on holiday or something - the weather might be nice over on the dark side.

True, this sequel doesn't seem to have the same intrigue as other horror follow-ups have had in the past, but sometimes knowing or expecting less can result in being pleasantly surprised by a sequel (*The Purge: Anarchy*, for instance). The only thing we do know is that the first movie's frightening use of film reel will be expanded with even more older mediums (such as 16mm and vinyl) this time. After the success of part one, *Sinister 2* looks to lengthen the reach of its own horror villain across the genre and while it's unlikely that Bughuul will be rubbing shoulders with the iconic likes of Chucky, Leatherface, Freddy, Jason, Michael, or even Mister Babadook any time soon, if this sequel tightens up the flaws of the first, but continues with the effective reel rolling frights that worked, it could be a step up into the right direction for this hopeful franchise.

Fade to black... BOO! Cue credits and scary music.

SINISTER 2 creeps into cinemas on August 21st.



SINISTER 2, 2015



FX CHAP

WORDS: PAUL MOUNT

Neill Blomkamp's latest movie returns to the Johannesburg stamping ground which he brought so memorably to the screen in his acclaimed debut feature *DISTRICT 9* in 2009. Set in the near-future, the film tells of a city where law and order are maintained by robot police scouts – and what happens when one robot, nicknamed CHAPPIE, falls into the wrong hands and is reprogrammed with an inquisitive, sometimes petulant human personality. *STARBURST* spoke to Chris Harvey, the film's Visual Effects Supervisor, about the challenges in bringing sci-fi's latest mechanical man to the screen...

STARBURST: What did your job as CHAPPIE's visual effects supervisor actually entail? Were you in charge of the film's digital and practical effects requirements?

Chris Harvey: No, primarily for me it was to do with digital. I was the overall supervisor and also running the main team over at Image Engine, which had the main FX tender on the movie. In pre-production you're often very involved in planning the builds, but in *CHAPPIE* we were very involved in terms of his actual design which was exciting. Neill knew how much he was going to rely on VFX in the end, so he got us in very early, earlier than you often get a chance to so we were actually part of the design phase. We were also involved in the pre-production, planning the shoot in terms of 'How are we gonna shoot this?' so that later on it'll come together in post-production, so there was a lot of pre-production planning, working together with all the different teams whether it was lighting, photography, working with special effects because we often work hand-in-hand. Then there's the shoot itself; you're on set every day, making sure people are doing what you'd previously told them you were going to need them to do and just dealing with surprises that come up on the day, and collecting all the data we need to have back and then we get into post and we're just executing the shots for however long the production cycle might be. You're basically creatively looking at everything that's coming in from the VFX side of it.

What were your first reactions when you saw what must have been a very ambitious script for CHAPPIE?

When I first read the script and first talked to Neill about it – I saw some early designs at the same time – it was really exciting,

because I loved the script, I thought it was gonna be a lot of fun but that there was definitely a big challenge ahead! You know there are going to be a lot of shots, he's going to be a fully-CG character and as he's the title character of the movie he's going to have to be *real*, people can't question his physicality or that he's actually there, because he *has* to be there. On top of that, people are going to have to connect with him as a robot which is tough because he doesn't have a lot of physical features, he doesn't have a lot to work with for emotions, apart from the ears and a couple of eye bars – mainly it's just body language. So that was the real challenge; step one: he's got to look real, step two: people have to relate to him somehow in a large range of shots and in any kind of environment. Just in those terms it was going to be a big task.

Most people might assume that CHAPPIE was realised through Motion Capture, but apparently that wasn't the case. Can you explain a little about how you actually created him and brought him to life?

The design process started really early on. Neill did a lot of concept designs over at Weta Workshops; hundreds of drawings went back and forth between them and once he got pretty much locked into a design he was happy with, he sent them over to us and we fleshed out the design in three dimensions so Neill could look all around it, and we printed out just on paper a life-sized one so he could stand there and look at it. We really went into detail, thinking 'Well, what are all the pieces that make him up?' It's one thing to have a sketch of it but then you start thinking 'How does this joint work, what does this gear do and where does this hose go?' Everything had to be built out of real-world mechanics, so we did

a lot of research into robotics, everything was based on that. We sent all our 3D files to Weta Workshop and they 3D-printed a whole bunch of 'practical' CHAPPIEs, which were used for any robots which were 'off' in the film, or just being dragged around so we could use them as lighting reference and then also for texturing. But because they were 'built' as a real robot, we were able to go in and take hundreds of thousands of photographs of these things and use all of those photographs to create our digital textures and shades to put on our digital asset. Then Sharlto [Copley] performed it; he wore a grey suit which a lot of people think was Motion Capture, but it really wasn't, it was just a grey bodysuit. Weta Workshop built a chest-piece made out of old motocross armour that had the same dimensions as CHAPPIE so that Sharlto could interact with people and lean against things, and we used his grey suit for lighting reference. Then the animators hand key-framed a performance to match his performance. So while he literally did the performance, it wasn't Motion Capture, it was all hand key-framed on top of him.





"IT'S VERY CHALLENGING BECAUSE FIRST OF ALL WE'VE GOT TO PAINT SHARLTO OUT OF THE SHOT - HE WAS LITERALLY HAND-PAINTED OUT - AND THEN WE HAD TO CREATE OUR DIGITAL VERSION SO HE FITS INTO THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SAME WAY.."

Some people call it rotomation or poor man's Motion Capture, but ultimately it was a huge team effort between Sharlto - a very good actor - giving a great performance and then the animators with their very detailed eye matching that performance by hand, copying it and adding subtleties on top of it.

Presumably the biggest challenges were in the sequences where he's closely and physically interacting with other characters and scenes where he's in chains or rain is falling on him?

Those scenes were a huge challenge. It was something I actually encouraged. A lot of the artists on the team were like: 'Stop telling them to do this!' jokingly but I was saying, 'This is gonna help us later, guys, this is gonna make it look real'. I would encourage Neill and the other actors to interact with CHAPPIE as much as possible, because typically you'll tend to shy away from that in VFX because those are hard shots when someone has to touch a digital character and they hug or they're on top of them or stepping on them or even if it's just getting Sharlto to pick things up. I was saying 'Walk around, touch stuff, move stuff, interact'. Even in the scenes with the chains, originally there were just a few chains and then Neill said, 'Would you mind if I put some more on him?' and we said to put a whole bunch on, because everyone knows how a chain moves and if he moves around the chains might bump into something or bump onto him and all those interactive things make him seem more believable. But for the artists when we get it back, it's very challenging because first of all

we've got to paint Sharlto out of the shot - he was literally hand-painted out - and then we had to create our digital version so he fits into the environment in the same way. It was a lot of effort from the team to make those shots work, but I think they help to make his physicality work.

It seems that without Sharlto Copley's input, CHAPPIE could have turned out quite differently...

Absolutely. Sharlto was CHAPPIE, there's no question! He was the heart and soul of that character in terms of his performance and his emotion and everything else. Neill and Sharlto would come up with ideas about what CHAPPIE would do in a given situation and the way people would interact with him. The animators layered some subtlety on top, they had to animate his ears and his eyebrows, but the performance is 100% Sharlto.

Neill Blomkamp came onto the movie with a very clear vision about the film's visual aesthetic, especially in terms of the realisation of CHAPPIE. As a VFX specialist, is there a risk that this could restrict your own creative input or is it helpful to have a director who's so well-prepared?

It's incredibly helpful because it's really important to have a clear decision-maker, not someone who's saying: 'oh, maybe we'll have this or maybe that, can you show me five options and maybe I'll pick one of them?' Neill's very clear with what he wants to do; the nice thing about him is that he doesn't prevent the creativity. He was still very open to new ideas. For example, on set I'd come up to him and say, 'Hey, we can do such-and-such here' and because he knew what he wanted in his story, it was easy for him to say, 'That's a great idea, it works, let's do it' or 'No, don't do it'. If it was an idea he liked, he was quick to grab it and say, 'Let's go with it.' So it really fostered creativity because it allowed him to trust us to do our job because we knew the framework we were working inside.

What were the other difficulties you encountered in bringing CHAPPIE to life?

Beyond the problems of getting his physical presence right, there was the question of making him emote. That was a big question. We figured out fairly early on through a bunch of tests that we could solve that one

and make him emote. The other challenge was in the sheer scope of work because there are 1000 shots of him, a huge volume of shots of a CGI character. And maybe people take it for granted because they think there's just one CGI CHAPPIE, but in reality we had over 22 CHAPPIEs because CHAPPIE had to progress through the film. He had to pick up dirt when he walked through something, if he got burnt by fire it had to leave burn marks, if he got hit in the face he'd be scratched. There were all these little variations and things which would build up through the course of the film that we had to track and make sure were consistent. A big story point is his battery level, which is going down throughout the film, and we had to track the percentage on it on every single shot and we sometimes had to go back in and change the battery level on shots which had changed slightly in the edit as now the percentage levels were off. There was just a massive amount of data tracking of making sure sequentially all those things hook up properly.

Do you think digital effects and practical effects can work side-by-side, or do you foresee a time when practical effects will become obsolete?

I hope practical effects never go away because there's an authenticity to them that. I don't care how good digital FX are, there's just something about something that's real and tangible and it's not even just about what's on screen at the end; it helps the cast. If you're on set and you've got a guy laying a bunch of squib hits on the ground so there's explosions going off around an actor who's running along, the performance is going to be much better than if he's just running in front of a green screen, because stuff's happening around him. I think that if people are smart, we should certainly be able to work together between practical FX and digital FX, it's really about finding the best way for the two to work hand-in-hand rather than saying, 'Oh, it's just practical' or 'Oh, it's just digital.' There's a lot of people who say movie-making should go back to practical, but it shouldn't because there's some stuff we can do better digitally and likewise everything shouldn't be just digital either; it's about finding the proper balance.

CHAPPIE is available now on Digital HD, Blu-ray, and DVD.

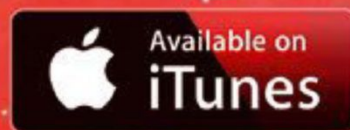


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HORROR Obscura

This month, the rampaging Robin Pierce moves onto a new decade for the second part of a trilogy of features looking at HAMMER FILM's FRANKENSTEIN series...

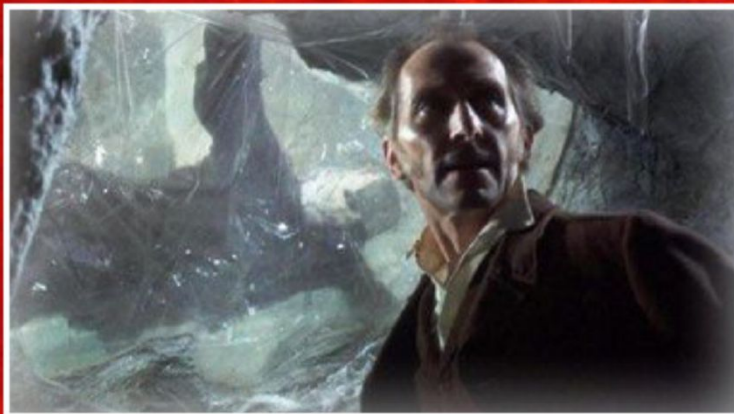
SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED



Part 2

The Swinging Sixties

The sixties were an exciting time for Hammer. The company had extended its roster of horror characters since *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), adding *The Mummy* (1959) to their franchise agenda. They had produced their own take on classic literary chillers like Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959), and Robert Louis Stevenson's Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde in *The Two Faces of Doctor Jekyll* in 1960. They had even launched the screen career of Oliver Reed in their one and only foray into the werewolf legend in *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1960). Even *The Phantom of the Opera* was given the Hammer treatment in 1962.



But, despite their increasing output, it was inevitable that the company would revisit the dominant characters that had been the foundation of the company's success. However, the sixties would be a strange and unsettling time for Baron Victor Frankenstein in particular, as Hammer seemed to cram him into films with no consideration given to continuity, nor a semblance of sense in some outings. Little wonder, then, that Peter Cushing looked a little weary at times.

We had last seen Frankenstein practising in Harley Street as Doctor Franck, having had his brain transplanted into a clone of sorts after his original body was torn apart by the unwilling amputees who had contributed to his last experiment in *The Revenge of Frankenstein*.

Six years later, in 1964, cameras rolled on *The Evil of Frankenstein* and the events of both its predecessors, *The Curse of Frankenstein* and its sequel, were completely ignored, if not dismissed outright.

The Evil of Frankenstein, directed by Freddie Francis, has the look and feel of Universal Pictures' monster films of the late thirties and early forties. It borrows plot points from both *Son of Frankenstein* (the monster being used for revenge under the spell of another) and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (the discovery of the monster in a cave,

perfectly preserved in ice). Even the monster himself, a hulking brute of a creature played by New Zealand wrestler Ernie "Kiwi" Kingston, bears a striking resemblance to the classic make-up created by Jack Pierce for Universal's films. Warner Brothers had distributed *The Curse of Frankenstein* and Columbia had distributed *Revenge*; consequently, Universal Pictures had exercised their copyright on the physical appearance of their monster – but with *Evil*, a deal had been struck with Universal to distribute the film, thus Hammer were now allowed free rein in how their creature looked. Thus, for this outing, a very familiar looking flattened-square head with a pronounced brow is seen, as are the clumsy, heavy boots that prevent him from doing little more than shuffle.

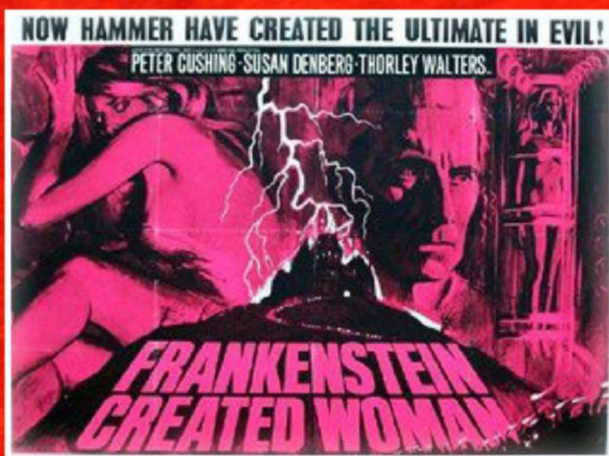
As the film starts, Frankenstein is inexplicably back in Switzerland by all appearances, again working on another new experiment with another new assistant, Hans (Sandor Elès). The bodysnatching involved in gathering the raw material for Frankenstein's work attracts the attention of a priest, who pays the Baron a visit in the watermill he has converted into a laboratory, and in a fit of righteous fury at the devil's work on display, the priest starts to destroy the equipment.

Fearing yet another mob, the Baron and Hans escape to Karlstadt, the site of the

Baron's ancestral pile and the scene of his original experiment ten years earlier. Anxious not to be seen by the villagers who had driven him out, he heads straight for home – but finds that that castle has been ransacked and looted – but the laboratory is still intact (though one would have thought that the scene of the crime would have been the first thing the pitchfork-and-blazing-torch brigade would've destroyed).

Outraged, the Baron and Hans head for the village, where Victor discovers that the Burgomaster and Chief of Police have some of his precious belongings. Of course, this outburst brings him the attention he was keen to avoid, so once again he has to evade capture and is helped by a deaf-mute beggar girl who leads them to a cave in the mountains overlooking the village. There, she has a 'friend' – Frankenstein's original creation, who is trapped in a glacial wall of ice, although we're not offered an explanation as to how he got there. However, this is not THE 'original' creature as in the one played by Christopher Lee, who was dissolved in acid at the end of *Curse* thus leaving no evidence for Victor to defend himself with at his trial.

After thawing, the creature is returned to the lab, where it is discovered that he is suffering from a brain trauma, and is virtually in a catatonic state. The only



means of resolving this problem is in the village, where a mesmerist named Zoltan (Peter Woodthorpe) is busy packing up his belongings having been expelled from the Karlstadt fair by the Chief of Police.

The hypnotist brings the monster to life, but places it under his hypnotic state. It will only do Zoltan's bidding, and Zoltan wants gold, money – and revenge. So the monster is sent out to steal and punish, though he takes the punish command too literally and starts murdering his targets.

When Frankenstein discovers what's happening, a power struggle ensues and in the grand Universal Pictures tradition, the monster is trapped in a burning laboratory and goes up in flames.

In retrospect, even the title of the film is misleading, as rather than portraying the evil nature of Frankenstein, the Baron is actually more of a victim here between the officials of Karlstadt stealing from him and the exploitive duplicity of Zoltan.

But as far as misleading titles go, the best was yet to come, as in 1967, with a tagline of "Now Hammer Have Created the Ultimate Evil" the fourth entry in the series was released – entitled *Frankenstein Created Woman*.

The audience that filed in to their local

cinemas hoping to see Hammer's take on the morally ambiguous *Bride of Frankenstein* story were in for a disappointing evening despite the lurid posters showing either a semi-robed or bare-chested (depending on which country you were in) Susan Denberg, broadly hinted as being 'the creation' this time, especially as another part of the same poster showed Denberg with an array of electrodes and lab paraphernalia around her. Sadly, Frankenstein (Cushing) does NOT create a woman in any way. He doesn't actually create anything. His role is more of a catalyst. The overall concept, though, is certainly innovative. In short, this film reverses the trend of Frankenstein's experiments resulting in misshapen disfigurement. The disfigured would become the image of flawless beauty.

The film starts off in style, with the execution of a petty criminal by guillotine, which is being witnessed by his small son Hans. Twenty years later, Hans has grown up, and is assisting Frankenstein (who seems to habitually hire people named Hans) and his sidekick, Dr Hertz (Thorley Walters). Hans (Robert Morris) also has a girlfriend, Christina (Susan Denberg), the disfigured daughter of the local tavern landlord.

Susan Denberg was a Polish-born model whose career took off, soared and crashed all in the same year. 1966

saw her featured as a *Playboy* magazine Playmate of the Month, followed by her acting début as one of *Mudd's Women* in the first season of *Star Trek*, before starting work on *Frankenstein Created Woman*. Tragically, her promising career was cut short by drug addiction and a nervous breakdown.

Frankenstein is experimenting with a deep freeze – literally freezing himself to death for an hour, then being revived by Hertz and Hans in an attempt to see if he has retained his soul, or whether the soul has left the body. Quite a spiritual and philosophical quest for a dedicated scientist.

Also, Frankenstein wears gloves constantly and is apparently unable to perform surgery, hence Dr Hertz's involvement. Whether Victor's hands were damaged in the fire at the end of the preceding *Evil* is never mentioned. Though employing Hertz, a befuddled chronic alcoholic, as a surrogate pair of hands for delicate surgery may not be the Baron's wisest decision, but then again, in this instalment, he's working under his given name of Frankenstein rather than an alias so it seems that sound judgement really isn't his strongest suit this time around.

When Hans is wrongly accused of the murder of Christina's father, he is put to death on the same guillotine as his late



father, and Christina, in a fit of despair, throws herself from a bridge and drowns in a river.

It's time to get to work. Frankenstein bribes the officials to let him have access to Hans' body and somehow manages to trap and store the soul, while Hertz fixes Christina up – not only restoring her to life, but also curing all her disfigurements, making her a radiantly beautiful blonde rather than a limping, facially disfigured redhead, and for a final flourish – they transplant Hans' soul into Christina's body.

But, as ever, there's a problem. Christina has amnesia, making it easier for Hans' influence to dominate – and he wants revenge on those who framed him for the murder. One killing spree later, Christina realises she has nothing left to live for and throws herself off a cliff to the sea below, leaving a regretful Frankenstein to walk away.

Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed! was the proclamation in 1969, when the Baron returned to the screen. Peter Cushing had always played the Baron with an icy cool detachment as a man of science. Not an evil man, but one who ruthlessly and relentlessly pursued knowledge, convinced that what he was doing would ultimately benefit mankind.

This time around, his portrayal was merciless and needlessly sadistic. He not only blackmails a young doctor, Karl (Simon Ward) and his fiancé Anna (Veronica Carlson) into sheltering and helping him with his experiments, but in a scene that was reportedly demanded by Hammer head James Carreras, despite the objections of stars Cushing and Carlson, he also rapes Anna. The whole tone of the performance was jarringly out of character. Audiences had seen Victor calmly eat his breakfast ("Pass the marmalade") while a scheming maid was killed by the creature in *The Curse of Frankenstein*, but outright sexual assault in a crudely written last-minute addition to the script was unnecessary, and was in fact cut out of the American release prints, though it remains in the U.K. version.

Pursued by Police Inspector Frisch (Thorley Walters returning, but in a different role) and hiding out in a boarding house close to an insane asylum where Dr Brandt, a previous colleague, is dying of pressure to the brain, Frankenstein needs to cure Brandt so he can learn the secrets of Brandt's discoveries. Brandt had found a method of removing a person's brain at the point of death and freezing it, thus preserving that person's entire body of knowledge for all time. The plan to remove Brandt from his cell in the asylum and to

the laboratory is worthy of *Mission: Impossible*. But the stress of the kidnap kills Brandt. Frankenstein has no option but to perform the world's first brain transplant, placing Brandt's brain into the body of asylum surgeon Professor Richter (played by the fabulous Freddie Jones). Seemingly, whatever was wrong with Victor's hands in the previous film has been cured.

Jones elicits more sympathy to the role of Frankenstein's creation than any actor since Boris Karloff, as he is tortured by the realisation that he no longer recognises himself in the mirror. Returning to his home and spurned by his wife who believes herself to be a widow, he douses the whole house in paraffin and waits for Frankenstein to arrive before allowing his wife to escape and starting an inferno which consumes both creator and created.

And so closed Frankenstein's casebook for the 1960's. The franchise would continue in the seventies, with a radical change. The actor playing the creature would remain constant, but Baron Frankenstein himself would undergo a radical transformation.

The Hammer Frankenstein story will conclude in Issue 416.





INDEPENDENTS DAY

by Ian White

Maria Olsen

**This month
INDEPENDENTS DAY
puts the spotlight
on MARIA OLSEN, a
prolific actor/writer/
producer whose company,
MOnsterworks66, have
made some of the more
interesting low budget
movies of recent years...**

You might not immediately recognise Maria Olsen's name, but if you watch enough horror movies, the chances are very high that you'll recognise her face. Even though she has only been making films for a relatively short period of time, Maria has an impressive list of credits behind her, including Rob Zombie's terrific *Lords of Salem*, *Paranormal Activity 3*, last year's FrightFest hit *Starry Eyes* and Jason Bognacki's mesmerising witchcraft fable *Another* (unfortunately renamed *The Devil's Daughter* for its impending theatrical release - don't let the new title put you off, it was easily my favourite film of last year). Eagle-eyed *American Horror Story* fans might also have spotted Maria in the second season *Asylum*.

But as if she wasn't busy enough, Maria is also (and this is how she describes herself) "*the MOnster that is MOnsterworks66*", an independent production company she owns that already has a raft of impressive and innovative movies in its catalogue including the recent horror/sci-fi noir *Way Down in Chinatown*, the wonderfully Gothic *Something Sinister* and the break-out festival hit *Live-In Fear*. That's not a bad track record, especially considering that MOnsterworks (yes, the capitalised MO stands for Maria's initials) only took on its first co-producing job in 2011.

STARBURST: Before we start talking about MOnsterworks can you give us a little background about yourself?

Maria Olsen: I was born and raised in South Africa, and started working in theatre when I was all of six years old. When I left the sunny South African shores for the equally sunny Los Angeles shores in January 2005, I had more than 50 theatre productions under my belt, including a gaggle of musical comedies, Shakespeare productions, straight plays, and musical revues. Once I hit Los Angeles, I worked in theatre for about two years until arriving at what has, so far, been the pinnacle of my stage career: working Off-Broadway with Zombie Joe's Underground Theatre Company and their production of Poe's *The Telltale Heart*, *The Masque of the Red Death* and *The Bells*. After that production wrapped, and I returned to LA, I decided to concentrate on film and haven't looked back since.

When and why did you decide to create MOnsterworks66?

In 2011, I formed my own production company, to co-produce Brandon Scullion's horror feature, *Live-In Fear*, which is now an award winning feature film - Best Grindhouse Feature at the 2014 Los Angeles RIP Horror Film Festival and Best Actress (Arielle Brachfeld) at the same festival - and will shortly be released through Wild Eye Releasing.

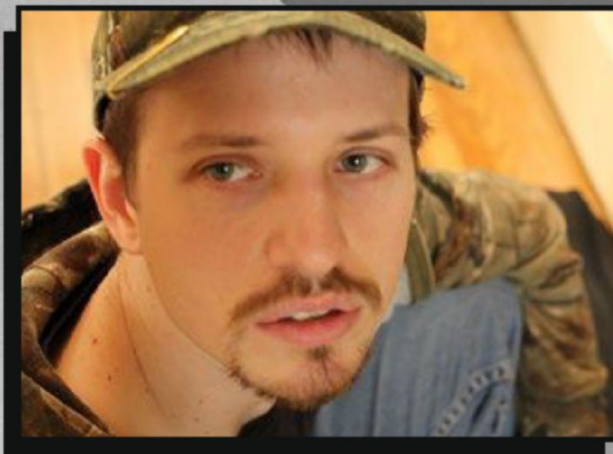
I created MOnsterworks66 as I no longer wanted to do the proverbial sitting-next-to-the-telephone-and-waiting-for-Spielberg-to-call thing. I wanted to be a part of creating projects that would give myself, and my fellow actors and filmmakers, the opportunity to get their work out there. I usually work as co-producer on the films I take on, and I'm usually active in promotions, publicity, development and casting.

With all the other production companies out there, what makes MOnsterworks66 stand out from the crowd? Do you have a 'mission statement'?

I describe MO66 as "*a company that specialises in connecting people so that movies can get made*". I have a huge number of industry connections, and it's quite easy for me to see where a hole in one production (think: a production looking for a person with specific skills or talents) can be filled by a peg in my network (think: a person who I know who has the skills



ANOTHER BLEEDING LOVE STORY



or talent that is being looked for). I get a great deal of satisfaction from getting people jobs on the films I co-produce, and I think it's better to give to, rather than take from, the Industry.

What was the first film you ever produced?

The first film I co-produced was Brandon Scullion's so-cool-it's-frozen art-house horror feature *Live-In Fear*. For two snowy weeks in February 2012, the *LiF* cast and crew took up residence in Brian Head, Utah, to shoot our film. I was a very hands-on producer for this project, and I did everything from breaking down the script and planning the shooting schedule to helping cast the film, and from buying all the food and meals for craft services to taking an actor with an ear infection to the emergency room at the nearest hospital at 3am down 30 miles of icy mountain road!

Brandon - who wrote and directed the film - and I are extremely proud of our micro-budget film, which is currently screening at festivals all over the world and which has already won two awards. We can't wait for it to be released later this year. *Live-In Fear* stars Arielle Brachfeld (*The Haunting of Whaley House*, *Axeman at Cutter's Creek*), Sarah Greyson (*Road Rules*), Chris Dorman and David Lautman. Our supporting cast comprises Nancy Wolfe (*Another, Helter Skelter*), Myles Cranford, Geoffrey Gould (*Simply Background*) and Charlene Geisler.

How would you describe yourself as a producer? And how do you juggle producing alongside your very busy life as an actor?

I am very hands-on, but exactly what I do on any particular co-production does depend on what the scope of my duties are. I tend to enjoy the administrative duties over the more practical duties, so you'll probably find me sending emails and posting on social media sites instead of out there location scouting or schmoozing with investors.

During my years as a

Bankruptcy Trustee/Liquidator for PriceWaterhouseCoopers, I learned how to prioritise my schedule and get everything done on time. I now apply the same principles in order to juggle my acting, my casting, and my producing responsibilities. Yes, I cast as well, and there are several projects that I'm attached to as only Casting Director and talent (as I was an actor before I became anything else in the business, I make sure that I'm attached as talent to every project I work on in an administrative capacity).

What is your favourite part of being a producer? Finding the material, setting up the deal, the actual process of making the film or settling back to watch the finished product?

There are two aspects that I really enjoy, and these are casting the film and shooting the film. With casting, I enjoy giving actors a chance to be a part of a new project, and I also love making contact with people from all over the country who are wanting to become a part of the film, and who are sharing their talents. With shooting, the magic is happening directly in front of your eyes, and it's a wonderful thing to witness. I don't think there is, for me, a better time than those few seconds or minutes between the words 'action' and 'cut'!

Not surprisingly (given the company's name) most of the films you produce are in the horror/comedy-horror/fantasy genre, as are the ones you make as an actor. Where did your interest in horror begin, and what do you think makes a good horror movie?

My interest in horror began literally at my mother's knee where we used to discuss *Dracula* films and stories (as did my interest in fantasy, by the way, and I still own my mother's full set of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* books). As I grew up, I devoured anything related to horror, science fiction, and fantasy, and I made it a standing promise to read Bram Stoker's *Dracula* once a year until I understood

it properly. I started the tradition when I was about 8 years old, and, given the wonderfully complex writing style he used in that book, it did indeed take me a few years to fully appreciate it.

I also adored the *Dark Shadows* world (NOT the Tim Burton adaptation!), and I still own my *DS* books and comics. If we start talking comics, actually, I might inform you that I also still own my 2,000+ collection of DC, Marvel, Gold Key, Classics Illustrated and other comic books!

To me, a good horror movie has a great story and is visually beautiful. Perhaps I should identify what good horror films should be by saying what they should NOT be: they should not have plot holes so big you can drive trucks through, they should not rely on genre tropes to get by (six teenagers go into the woods... will just put me to sleep as will the 100th zombie apocalypse film this month). They should not be remakes or reboots - we enjoyed the original, thanks - and there are tons of new ideas out there if you just look for them. They should not be sloppily edited - I saw a film last night where eggs disappeared and reappeared on a plate between takes faster than the ice shelves are melting! And producers and directors should hire competent actors. Yes, I've seen a casting breakdown that said "we want actors and no experience is necessary because this is just a horror film" - come ON, people! I think what would sum it all up is that I want horror films from filmmakers who love and respect the horror genre to give their films the respect they deserve.

What elements do you look for when you're choosing a project a) as a producer, and b) as an actor? Do you tend to look for scripts that you could also appear in?

When I look at a project to see if I'd like to come on board as a co-producer, I look at the quality of the writing and of the story. If a script is not written well, or if the story has holes the size of Gibraltar, I will not want to put my name behind it. And, yes, a huge factor in my taking on producing projects is whether or not there is a role

for me. Because I'm so extremely busy at the moment, I've limited the new scripts I will read for possible producing purposes to only those that contain leading or large supporting roles for me.

When I review a project to see if I'd like to act in it, I tend to look at the type of role and the journey the character has to go on and, obviously, at the writing and story quality. I tend to be a bit more lenient towards the projects I only act in, though, because, very often, they will not take up a lot of my time: a one or two-day commitment to act vs. a several-year-long commitment to produce!

Horror films seem to arrive in cycles - vampires are the big thing for a few months and then they're gone, then there are a glut of zombie movies, then slashers - how much of being a producer is predicting trends? Or do you not tend to worry about that kind of thing?

I really don't worry about predicting trends, and I'd very much rather get hold of a good story and make it into a movie. I'm all for going against the flow, too, and I would only want to make films that excite me and not that are written to a formula to just try and cash-in on some perceived spate of popularity.

Anyway, if you write a script today about what's hot now, by the time it gets out of post-production - on the TINY chance that you'll actually get someone to produce it - the 'what's hot' topic will be frozen solid!

Do MONsterworks66 produce content outside of the horror genre?

Yes, MO66 does indeed produce outside of the horror genre, and *Faraway*, the fantasy-adventure I co-produced with Randal Kamradt Jr.'s Soliloquy Films, just appeared on Amazon Prime (US). *Faraway* was shot mainly in the Philippines, with one day in a studio in Los Angeles, and had its US premiere at the Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival late in 2014.

MO66 also teamed up with Edward Payson's An AntiHero Production to shoot the documentary *Our Friend Jon* in Derry, New Hampshire, last October. We've shot about 90% of the film so far and, as it's about the making of another film - the short film *Rose Thorn* - we're now awaiting that film's premiere in New Hampshire so that we can cover it in our film. Once that's done, we'll be diving into post-production and will soon be looking for festival and distribution opportunities for *Our Friend Jon*, which will bring the legacy of aspiring filmmaker, Jonathan Hernandez, who passed away from sickle cell anaemia in late 2013, to the big screen.

How difficult is it to raise money for a project? What are the difficulties/advantages of co-producing with other companies?

It is almost impossible to raise money for a project! I always wish that I could win the lottery so that I could just get stuck in and produce all the wonderful films that are currently sitting 'in

development' on my slate!

The trick about co-producing is to find those people that you like to work with, and work with them over and over again. Conversely, if you find people whose working styles don't match your own, don't produce with them as the years of conflict you could have in your future are just not worth it!

The advantage of co-producing - for me - is that, unless I want to spend a few years at Film School to learn technical skills, I would not be able to actually MAKE the film. I can cast, promote and do everything else admin, but when it comes to actually shooting and editing, I don't have the required skills.

And after the film's made, how hard is it to get distribution? Are platforms like Video on Demand and Internet streaming more important than ever to independent filmmakers?

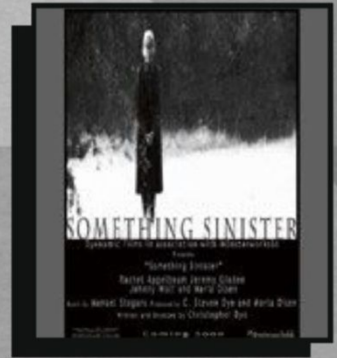
It's easy to get distribution - if your film is even vaguely watch-worthy - but it's very hard to find a distributor who is totally (or even partially) transparent about their accounting processes. And it's even HARDER to find one with a reputation of paying filmmakers for distributing their film... Also, when you factor in all the illegal downloading and pirating shenanigans where you have tons of people being able to see the film without ever having to buy it or pay for it, the paying film-watching core group gets ever smaller, so it's no wonder that distribution returns are shrinking...

A lot of indie filmmakers are moving towards making more use of Internet streaming sites - the legitimate ones! - due to a number of factors including not having a lot of funds available for publicity and advertising, wanting to keep control over their films' sales, and wanting to make sure that the revenue stream, what there is of it, goes straight to them. The streaming sites are also a place for true indie films on the micro-budget level that have no names to offer the public (no names = hardly any attraction to distributors except for in the horror genre), and they are at least a platform on which one's work can be seen if one is able to get the word out about the film's being on the site!

You use the Internet and social networking incredibly well, how important has social networking been to MONsterworks66 and do you envisage a time when the Internet might be a filmmaker's most important resource?

Social networking has been incredibly important and has hugely contributed to my company's growth. I've recently picked up a co-producing, casting and acting gig with a production company out of Atlanta, Georgia, and I'm presently looking into collaborating on other projects with filmmakers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and Arizona. Every week, I get requests from overseas filmmakers to assist them with their projects (although most times I have to decline because, at the moment, I'm only set up to produce in the US). The bottom line is that my name would NEVER have gotten further than the





SOMETHING SINISTER

outskirts of Los Angeles (if that!) if it weren't for social media.

And I have one basic social media rule that I stick to: market the project I'm involved in, not myself. So far it's working pretty well! Filmmakers who are not social media savvy are indeed missing out.

You're also a terrific writer. Do you see any screenwriting for MONsterworks66 in your future?

I've already written a full screenplay, but I still have a long way to go with re-writes and editing on that one before I can do anything more with it.

Whether I will write a feature that I will produce - and I'd LOVE to do that - remains to be seen, however, as, unfortunately, I don't have a lot of free time that I could dedicate to writing.

Do you think, despite all the difficulties of getting a project into production and out in front of the public, independent filmmaking still has a creative edge over the major studios? A few years ago, most independent cinema was very much 'art-house-niche' but more and more independent films are coming to the forefront.

Yes, I totally believe that Indiewood still has a creative edge over Hollywood. Indiewood belongs to the 'Show', while Hollywood belongs to the 'Business', and it therefore follows that the former will be more concerned with the attractiveness of content, while the latter will be more concerned with whether the content will be profitable.

Hollywood will cater more towards properties with already-established fan bases - and, let's face it, even if they put out a really bad franchise film, fans will STILL go to see it, even if only to know what they're complaining about - and this is merely good business strategy. All corporations must, after all, work towards making a profit; it's a fundamental law of business, and that is, after all, their sole reason for existing.

I'm not saying that independents - especially the bigger budget independents

- aren't out to make a profit because everyone really is. What I AM saying, though, is that the indies still have that pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit that the studios seem to have lost on their way to the bank.

Quite a few producers (especially horror producers) seem to be branching out into areas like comic books and video gaming. Is that something you'd ever consider?

I would definitely consider ancillary markets like comics or games, but only if I had considerably more funding. My reasoning behind this is that I know almost nothing about how the comic or the gaming industries work, and I would have to employ professionals who could hold my hand while I navigated the waters.

I adore comics, though, and I grew up reading them. I also enjoy video games, although my mind prefers puzzle games like *Tetris* to quest games. I do think there are definite opportunities for cross-media tie-ins, but, as I said, I would have to be walked through the process.

How important is it to you to find and nurture new talent? Who are the filmmakers you've worked with that we should be looking out for?

I love working with people who I know are talented and who I know will always deliver on set, so I tend to bring the brightest and the best of the people I work with back time and time again to work on more projects.

On the other hand, I also enjoy discovering new talent, and I usually do this during the audition process. Recently, I've had the opportunity to audition girls from across the USA for the leading role in a feature I'm casting, and I have to say that the wealth of talent that is out there is truly phenomenal.

Filmmakers who I've worked with in a co-production capacity and who you should definitely keep your eyes open for include Randal Kamradt Jr. of Soliloquy Films, Edward Payson of An AntiHero Production, Brandon Scullion of Iodine Sky Productions, and Justin Calen Chenn.

What would be your 'dream' MONsterworks66 project?

An art-house horror feature with a great role for me that I had sufficient money to fully fund without having to look for outside investors and where I could make use of the talents of all my filmmaking and acting friends.

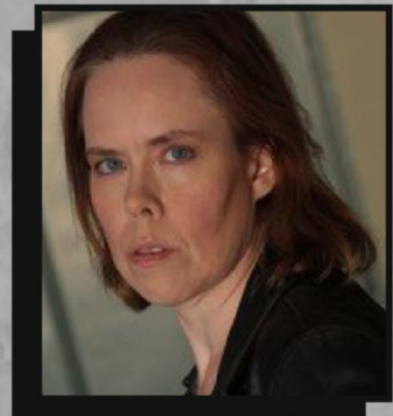
"When you wish upon a star..."

Finally, what are you/MONsterworks working on at the moment?

At the moment, MO66 is working on developing a slate of three horror-comedies, Phil Condit's *Happy Ending*, and Rycke Foreman's *Grizzled!* and *Hacked Off!*, and we're shortly going to be moving into the financing stage. Further upcoming MO66 co-productions include the black comedy serial kill caper, Austin Sheeley's *Another Bleeding Love Story*, which is presently in post-production and horror/thrillers James Sizemore's *Black Wolf*, Luke Genton's *The Bone Box* and Mike Sitnikov's *Skeptic*, which are moving towards pre-production.

You can find out more and connect with MARIA OLSEN on her Facebook page: facebook.com/mariaolsenfanpage, on Twitter @mariaolsen66 and through the MONsterworks66 page: facebook.com/monsterworks66.

Photo Credits: Rachel Appelbaum, Rycke Foreman, Phil Condit, Jason Denney.





LIVE-IN FEAR

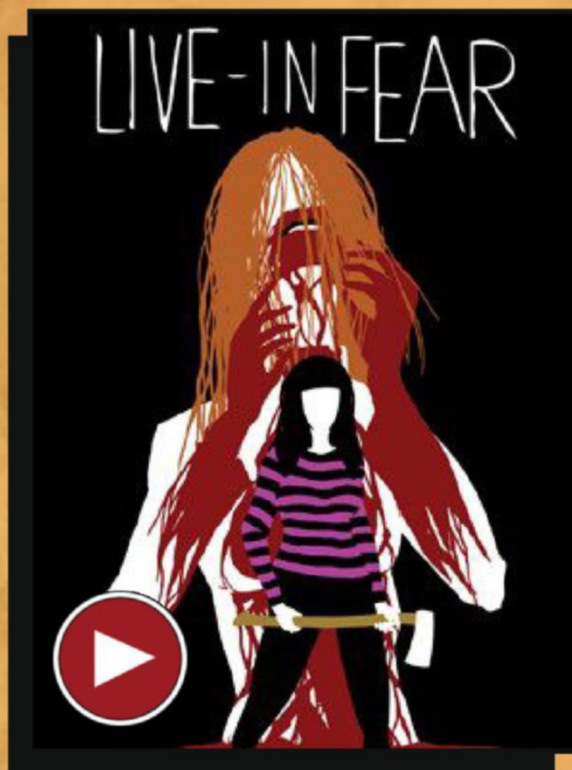
CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BRANDON SCULLION / STARRING: SARAH GREYSON, ARIELLE BRACHFELD, DAVID LAUTMAN, MARIA OLSEN, CHRIS DORMAN / RELEASE DATE: TBC

When young couples Seth and Mallory (Lautman and Brachfeld) and Eric and his aspiring actress girlfriend Becca (Dorman and Greyson) take a vacation in the wintry Utah mountains, events rapidly take a violent and nastily bloody turn. 'The Aspens' might appear to be a peaceful little nest of snowbound condominiums, with the bizarre 'Papa' and 'Mama' White (Geoffrey Gould and Nancy Wolfe) and resort handyman Ferry (Myles Cranford) the only residents, but – as one of the characters states very early on in the story – "There certainly is something peculiar about this place."

'Peculiar' is an understatement. From the opening moments, when Seth tells Eric the local ghost story about 'the bloody bride', to an off-kilter meeting with Ferry and his ever-present axe, to Mama's ominous parting comment "You could have made this so much easier on yourselves" it is obvious that this holiday is not going to end well. And why is Seth so jittery, and why doesn't he want anyone else to handle the luggage he packed into the back of their car? And what do the dozens of wooden crosses, planted like headstones in the banked snow, signify? Not to mention the mysterious robed figures chanting in the woods and the box of homemade videotapes they find waiting for them when they arrive, one of which shows a mysterious woman, hazy in the dark static-heavy image, who says – as if she is talking through the screen, directly to Seth – "I miss you."

Seth quickly shuts the video off. But imagine his surprise when, a short time afterwards, he finds the same mysterious woman waiting for him when he returns to the condo – a woman who, the last time he saw her, had been cut up in several pieces.

Writer/director Scullion's *Live-In Fear* is a micro-budget indie-horror masterpiece. It's not difficult to see why it has garnered so many rave reviews at festivals around the world and already become something of a cult hit, winning Best Grindhouse Feature at the 2014 Los Angeles RIP Horror Film Festival. On paper, this is a story we have all heard before – young-victims-in-peril-out-in-the-woods ranks alongside found footage as one of those clichéd genre set-ups it's probably best to avoid – but Scullion uses our over-familiarity to his advantage. There are one or two moments in *Live-In Fear* that misdirect us brilliantly, and



one particularly good jump-scare that even had this cynical old reviewer startled.

Scullion's lean screenplay, coupled with his impressive but un-showy work behind the camera (there's an especially fine inverted shot of Olsen – as the mysterious woman haunting Seth – which rolls suddenly and vertiginously upright, keeping the viewer as off-balance as Seth is feeling), assures us we are in the hands of a filmmaker who knows exactly what he is doing. His cast do sterling work as well, especially Brachfeld as the self-harming Mallory and veteran actress Nancy Wolfe (*Another, Helter Skelter*) whose scenes as Mama are among the best in the movie. Chris Dorman, despite playing a character that – at times – is too much like a 'junior' version of *The Shining*'s Jack Torrance for comfort (right down to his being a recovering alcoholic now fallen off the wagon), also does well. In fact, it's comparisons with *The Shining* that stop *Live-In Fear* from being a truly great film. From the opening scene when the four friends are driving through the snow-capped mountains, to an establishing shot of 'The Aspens' that makes it resemble a miniature Overlook Hotel, to a scene towards the end of the film that fleetingly recalls the moment when Scatman Crothers' psychic cook returns to the Overlook and doesn't quite save the day, Kubrick's film hangs over *Live-In Fear* like a gentle shadow. Not enough to spoil it (maybe other viewers haven't even noticed it) but occasional 'similarities' between the two films are distracting enough to momentarily take one out of the movie. It's only a small negative though and, for some, could go unnoticed.

As a co-production between Iodine Sky and Maria Olsen's MOnsterworks66, it is a film of which producers Scullion (yes, he co-produces as well) and Olsen can be justifiably proud.

Keep a watch out for it. When you get the chance to see it, don't miss out.



REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



ANT-MAN

CERT: 12A / **DIRECTOR:** PEYTON REED / **SCREENWRITERS:** EDGAR WRIGHT, JOE CORNISH, ADAM MCKAY, PAUL RUDD / **STARRING:** PAUL RUDD, MICHAEL DOUGLAS, EVANGELINE LILLY, COREY STOLL, BOBBY CANNAVALE, MICHAEL PEÑA, ANTHONY MACKIE, ANTHONY THE ANT / **RELEASE DATE:** JULY 17TH

Last autumn, all eyes were on Guardians of the Galaxy, Marvel Studios' first non-superhero all-out space opera, based on an obscure comic book series and starring the little-known Chris Pratt. Pundits wondered if this could be the movie to finally throw a space spanner in the works of Marvel's intricately detailed and meticulously-planned cinematic Universe. \$775 million later and an audacious new franchise is launched - Vol 2 lenses next year - and Chris Pratt becomes Hollywood's go-to action hero overnight, dominating summer 2015 box offices in Jurassic World. This year, it's Ant-Man, a more traditional superhero character but also not exactly racing alongside Spider-Man, Thor and Iron Man in the public's consciousness. Surely this time Marvel have gone too far, surely this time they've dropped the ball?

Not a bit of it. Following a long and difficult gestation period bringing him to the screen, Ant-Man is an absolute blast of a movie. After the dour Captain America: The Winter Soldier and the thunderous, often portentous Avengers: Age of Ultron, Ant-Man is a glorious, irreverent ray of

sunshine in a genre that tends to take itself a bit too seriously occasionally. It's very determinedly part of the established Marvel Universe - the film is dotted with references to and from other films (and there's even a cameo from a couple of familiar faces and post-credits sequences you won't want to miss) - and yet it has a welcome fleetness of foot and lightness of touch which makes it a great rollicking adventure film in its own right. It's helped, of course, by the casting of Paul Rudd as Scott Lang/Ant-Man; best-known for a string of undemanding comedies, he brings his considerable comic chops to the role and yet he's clearly also glorying in the opportunity to be an action hero at last - and one in a fancy costume, to boot. The core storyline is fairly generic off-the-peg stuff; nasty bad guy Darren Cross (Corey Stoll presumably filling in for Mark Strong who clearly wasn't available to play his signature 'bald baddy' role), a former protégé of the first Ant-Man, Hank Pym (a superb performance by Michael Douglas clearly having a great time), is determined to develop his own 'shrinking' technology

which he intends to sell to the highest bidder, military or otherwise. Hank sees the risks inherent in such technology falling into the wrong hands so, by a roundabout fashion, he enlists the help of hapless ex-con Scott Lang and, alongside his despairing daughter Hope (Lilly) trains him in the use of the original Ant-Man suit. Slowly but surely Lang learns to communicate with the Earth's smallest creatures, who become his staunch allies and a powerful, implacable army. But initially, Scott's a reluctant and fairly inept hero and when Cross finally discovers the secret of shrinking technology, it looks like time might be running out...

Ant-Man is an old-school thrill ride. It's frequently laugh out-loud funny - Scott's three bumbling homie ex-con friends are a hoot and get some of the best gags - and, when in full-on action mode, breathtakingly exciting. It's easy to be dismissive and ambivalent about CGI and special effects in an era when it seems there's nothing Hollywood can't do, but the FX here, powered by Reed's urgent, restless direction - are genuinely astonishing. It's a film that needs to be seen in 3D, as the sequences where Scott shrinks and is either lost and imperilled in a world of blissfully-unaware giants or else riding on the back of his new best friend, flying ant Anthony, can really only best be properly appreciated in 3D. Ant-Man is probably the best argument yet for 3D filmmaking; in 2D, it'd surely be a flatter and less immersive experience.

Ant-Man is a joyous grab-bag of delights with subtle touches and flourishes which will delight fans of the comic strip character (whose own convoluted backstory is well documented but sympathetically untangled here), newcomers devoted to the Marvel cinematic world and just about anyone who enjoys an intelligent, adrenalised and light-hearted adventure fantasy. Edgar (Shaun of the Dead) Wright may have been ousted from the project last year, but Reed's direction has many flourishes Wright will surely approve of and the script, largely the work of Wright and co-writer Joe (Attack the Block) Cornish, is packed with their trademark clever, good-natured, no-nonsense wit.

Fast, fun-packed (but never frivolous) and riotously, raucously enjoyable, Marvel have defied the odds and they've done it yet again. Watch Ant-Man fly.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED +++++ ++ 7

ACTUAL +++++ +++++ + 9



INSIDE OUT

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: PETE DOCTER, RONALDO DEL CARMEN / SCREENPLAY: PETE DOCTER, RONALDO DEL CARMEN, MEG LEFAUVE, JOSH COOLEY / STARRING: AMY POEHLER, PHYLLIS SMITH, LEWIS BLACK, BILL HADER, MINDY KALING, RICHARD KIND, KAITLYN DIAS, DIANE LANE, KYLE MACLACHLAN / RELEASE DATE: JULY 24TH

Riley is a young girl controlled by her emotions. Literally. Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear and Disgust all live inside her head, taking turns keeping her safe and happy. When Riley's idyllic rural life is disrupted by a move to San Francisco, the emotions become unsure how to deal with the upheaval and, despite their best intentions, end up doing more harm than good.

One of the problems with producing movies of almost consistently exceptional quality is that every time you have a runaway success the expectation is that much higher the next time. Fortunately for Pixar, *Inside Out* is an utter delight.

Appropriately, the main emotion featured is Joy, an anthropomorphised bundle of sugar-coated squeee. She sees herself as the one in charge because as far as she (and to a lesser extent the others) is concerned, Riley's happiness is all that is important. When an accident causes Joy and Sadness to become lost within Riley's mind, things begin to fall apart, and Joy begins to realise she might not be all that truly matters.

As Riley is growing up, Joy has to grow up with her and understand that life is not just about simply being happy, and that all emotions are necessary to play a part in how we think and act as a person. When you're young, emotions are uncomplicated things and very much one thing or another, but as we mature we start to associate different feelings with the same memories and modes of behaviour. One scene where we see inside the heads of Riley's mum and dad, as well as being a hilarious interlude, also

subtly illustrates this, showing the adults' emotions as being far more similar to each other and operating with a degree of harmony that Joy and the others fundamentally lack.

Growing up not only involves becoming a more emotionally complex human being, but also leaving behind the parts of yourself that may have been all that mattered to you once upon a time, but slowly begin to become unnecessary as you mature. This is seen most clearly with Bing Bong, Riley's imaginary friend from when she was a small child, who is found wandering the hallways of her memories and still reliving the adventures they had together, the pure innocence from which he was created rendering him unable to perceive the tragedy of his own obsolescence.

The internal logic by which Riley's mind operates functions perfectly; the decisions of the emotions at their control console translating neatly to Riley's actions, while the numerous areas within her mind (the film studio Dream Productions, in particular, is a stroke of genius) provide a highly varied and imaginatively constructed journey for Joy and Sadness to take back to Headquarters. Along the way, they ride the train of thought, encounter Riley's deep fears locked in a prison in the shadowy caves of her subconscious, take a dangerous shortcut through abstract thought (represented with abstract artwork), and learn why memories of skills you might have spent months learning fade with disuse, but the annoying jingle of a TV advert will remain indelibly burned

into your brain after a single viewing.

Appropriately for a story about emotions, the film gets a little poignant at times, and only the hardest of hearts will not get at least a little choked up as the film reaches its climax. Aside from this, the film is as bright and cheerful as its perpetually upbeat protagonist, and its infectious enthusiasm, wonder, and yes, joy will thoroughly enchant anyone who either is a child or ever was one.

ANDREW MARSHALL

EXPECTED ++++++ 9

ACTUAL ++++++ 10



STARBURST



TERMINATOR GENISYS

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: ALAN TAYLOR / SCREENPLAY: LAETA KALOGRIDIS, PATRICK LUSSIER / STARRING: ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, EMILIA CLARKE, JAI COURTNEY, JASON CLARKE, J.K. SIMMONS, MATT SMITH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you haven't already seen the latest trailers and posters for Terminator Genisys, AVOID THEM AT ALL COSTS! The film adds a pretty huge wrinkle to the Terminator timeline, one that could have been one of the best, most head-scratching moments of the year, if it hadn't been ruined by an over-eager marketing team. Needless to say, you won't find this spoiler discussed here.

What you will find is a film that seems to worship the canon of James Cameron's original Terminator films while simultaneously smashing it.

Judgment Day, the day the A.I. Skynet tries to wipe out humanity in nuclear fire, once again takes place on August 29th 1997, the date described in the original films (having been updated in the sequels). Those who survived banded together under the leadership of one John Connor (Jason Clarke), to fight back against the machines. After a hard-fought war, humanity triumphs, but not before Skynet uses the world's first "tactical time weapon" to send a Terminator cyborg back to 1984 to kill John Connor's mother Sarah before he's even born. So far, so 1984.

This time, however, when John sends his friend Kyle Reese (Jai Courtney) back in time to protect his mother, instead of finding the naïve, poodle-haired waitress of the first film, a much more capable and heavily-armed Sarah saves him from a familiar foe, along with the assistance of an aging "pet" Terminator she calls "Pops" (Arnold Schwarzenegger, obviously).

How did this happen? Is the "original" timeline gone forever? What happens to the future now? How, after A Good Day

to Die Hard and I, Frankenstein, does Jai Courtney keep getting work?

Surprisingly, most of these questions (except, perhaps, the last one) are resolved acceptably, and in many cases quite cleverly, but unfortunately the writers take this approach with a lot of ideas; introducing an initially dumb-sounding concept, waiting out the eye-rolling of the fans, and then showing how clever they are by revealing it to be perfectly well thought-out and in keeping with this new version of the franchise.

For example, in what seems like an incredibly lazy way to move the plot along, this version of Reese develops prophetic dreams telling him where next to strike at Skynet. Eventually an explanation is forthcoming, and not only does it fit neatly within the new temporal rules of the film, but it's then reused a number of times, to great effect.

Despite these frequent hiccups, director Alan Taylor (Thor: The Dark World) keeps the pedal to the metal for almost the entirety of the film, only letting off on the enjoyable action to build up the central trio of Emilia Clarke, Schwarzenegger and Courtney or to take an unexpected detour to make room for an awful joke involving the old TV show Cops in the third act!

Thankfully the cast are engaging. Clarke doesn't quite fill the Polaroid picture frame of Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor, but after Terminator 2, that's an insanely high standard to live up to. Clarke does as well as anyone could be expected to, whether toting massive weaponry or sharing tender moments with her surrogate parent Terminator.

Schwarzenegger settles back into the role that made him famous like a well-worn biker jacket, and despite his age (and thanks to decent special effects) he manages to be fully engaged in the action, taking on multiple Terminators in epic battles. He's also given more than enough opportunities to offer classic one-liners, most of which land perfectly on target.

Courtney is the weakest of the trio, turning Michael Biehn's intense, desperate, cool Kyle Reese into a somewhat competent but almost perpetually confused lunkhead. J.K. Simmons also pops up as an engaging witness to our heroes' adventures and his presence, along with numerous jokes shared between the main cast, lends a pretty light-hearted tone to a movie about averting the apocalypse.

Courtney's casting, all those jokes, the rippling timeline and THAT twist all make Genisys feel like Terminator: Remix or an odd spin-off of the franchise. If you can accept this, then the film can be quite enjoyable, but many will be sure to dismiss it out of hand.

A franchise implies sequels and those clever writers again manage to create a mostly satisfying conclusion to the film, give Arnie the option to turn up again if he wants to and then provide a back door to future sequels during the credits.

Judgment Day, it seems, can be stopped. Terminator sequels... not so much.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED	+++++	4
ACTUAL	++++++	7



TED 2

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: SETH MACFARLANE / SCREENPLAY: SETH MACFARLANE, ALEC SULKIN, WELLESLEY WILD / STARRING: MARK WAHLBERG, SETH MACFARLANE, AMANDA SEYFRIED / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's fair to say that from the beginning of *Ted 2*, when the opening credits stop the film dead for three minutes of a big musical number, we realised we weren't going to get along with it. Sadly, this did indeed not bode well for the rest of the film, as it stops for musical or drug-related interludes another three or four times.

Actually, we should be grateful that it spends time

away from the main plot. Here's a question for you: have you seen the excellent *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode 'The Measure of a Man' about Data's struggle to be recognised as a person? You have? Then you've already seen this movie. Let's consider a follow-up question, for those who haven't watched that fine hour of television. Have you seen literally any recent

buddy movie? Then, again, you've essentially seen *Ted 2*. This is a film completely devoid of any originality.

While ordinarily, the film would get points for its attempts to relate the plot to ongoing civil rights issues, it's a bit hard to take that seriously when this message is chucked at you with all the subtlety of a brick. The other issue we have with it is that the eponymous bear may be many things, but he is neither a human being nor a person. If you're trying to lend legitimacy to current struggles for equality (which was certainly the way it looked to us), maybe don't use a comedy film to give the opposition ammunition? Just a thought.

But it's a comedy, the plot isn't important, you say. That is true to an extent, but there's a difference between having an excuse plot and adhering rigidly to a precisely timed movie template (the third act's coming around? Must be time for a completely arbitrary argument

designed to separate the two leads). It's just insulting and isn't good enough in this day and age.

For what it's worth, there are some genuine laughs in there. But there was just so much that we didn't like. The unnecessary fight at Comic-Con, the endless cameos (what exactly was the point of Liam Neeson's cameo? Answers on a postcard) and the truly horrendous life advice. Guess what? Apparently babies can fix a broken marriage.

There's a whole spiel in the film about how so many people end up on the wrong side of history. You can laugh at the dumb jokes, but if you try and defend this as a good movie then that's where you lose us. Consider where your money is going and the films that your ticket money is funding. Please, don't end up on the wrong side of history.

SCOTT VARNHAM

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 3



MINIONS

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: KYLE BALDA, PIERRE COFFIN / SCREENPLAY: BRIAN LYNCH / STARRING: SANDRA BULLOCK, PIERRE COFFIN, JON HAMM, JENNIFER SAUNDERS, MICHAEL KEATON, ALLISON JANNEY, STEVE COOGAN, GEOFFREY RUSH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Minions *shouldn't* work. Anything designed to be this cute, endearing and funny should be annoying as hell, call it the "Jar-Jar effect", but after arriving seemingly fully formed with relatively little fanfare in 2010's *Despicable Me*, they nonetheless managed to steal the show from Steve Carell's Gru in their debut and its 2013 sequel. So much so that they now have their own movie; a prequel and an origin story, of sorts, for the yellow, denim dungaree-wearing weirdos.

Minions is only an origin story in the very loosest definition of the term, their original creation mostly explained away as: they just evolved this way, so deal with it. Without any real reason, a large part of that DNA is that

they want to be led by the most evil creature they can find. Unfortunately for any prospective bosses, the other parts of their DNA contain a certain tendency for accident proneness, not at any risk to themselves of course, but that can prove terminal for whoever decides to take them on. After a particularly bad run of luck, narrated by Rush, the minions settle down to live in an underground idyll away from the world. Without a boss, however, they become despondent pretty quickly and so it falls to one particular minion, Kevin, to venture back out into the world to find his buddies a boss, less-than-ably-assisted by music-loving Stuart, who has no real idea what he has been volunteered for, and eager,

adventure loving (if a bit silly) Bob. Oh, and not forgetting Bob's teddy bear Tim.

The ensuing adventure is less a story progression than a series of sketches all linked by the common presence of these three minions in 1968. They'll have some hijinks in an uptown department store, encounter a slightly mad family on a road trip, attend "villain-con" (essentially comic-con for villains, there's even a "Hall H" reference for the faithful), bump into famous figures of the '60s and try and get Scarlett Overkill (Bullock), the biggest villain around, to take them on as her minions, all accompanied by an era specific soundtrack. Getting accepted by Scarlett will require the completion of some tasks, usinggadgets provided by Scarlett's husband, Herb (Hamm), but really after this point things just get more and more silly. Importantly though, they do so while remaining entertaining, especially when Jennifer Saunders' buck-toothed, have-a-go, '60s Queen Elizabeth pops up, although it's hard to say just how UK audiences will take to all the cod-Englishness on display here.

While boasting an impressive cast, many of the bigger names appear only as extended cameos. Keaton and Janney pop up here and there, Steve Coogan only appears for

a very brief scene at villain-con, while Bullock and Hamm weave in and out of the story from the middle until the end. Bullock is on great form as the temperamental Scarlett, relishing every purr and snarl as her moods swing, and Hamm is pretty much unrecognisable. The brunt of the movie, however, rests squarely on the shoulders of co-director Pierre Coffin, who is credited as voice of the minions. Most of the movie is his sing-song dialogue, sometimes consisting of total gibberish, sometimes with scatterings of French, Spanish and even Malay, amongst others, thrown into the mix. Along with some savvy writing he manages to create characters, and even character arcs, for Kevin, Stuart and Bob, and it never becomes wearing. Yes, the minions somehow manage to retain their charm in this third outing, whether it's due to their slapstick antics, weirdly mundane names, sunny dispositions (especially Bob) or just the fact that it's impossible to know just how they'll react in any given situation.

The minions movie is almost complete nonsense, but it's good natured, enjoyable nonsense nonetheless.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++++ 8

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



CHAPPIE

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NEILL BLOMKAMP / SCREENPLAY: NEILL BLOMKAMP, TERRI TATCHELL / STARRING: SHARLTO COPLEY, DEV PATEL, HUGH JACKMAN, SIGOURNEY WEAVER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Two features on from his sparkling 2009 debut *District 9* and Neill Blomkamp is still struggling to properly establish himself as the imaginative, visionary talent promised by his first movie. 2013's *Elysium* dissolved into a rather limp by-the-numbers action movie and now *CHAPPIE*, an exploration of what could happen if artificial intelligence suddenly becomes more than just artificial, never finds its feet due to its dizzyingly uneven tone, ghastly supporting characters and a titular robot who really should have been turned into ornamental ashtrays at the earliest possible opportunity.

Blomkamp returns to the Johannesburg stamping ground brought to life so vividly in *District 9*. In the near future, robot droids are the custodians of law and order, and their developer, scientist Deon Wilson (Dev Patel), has created a form of artificial intelligence which he's keen to test on one of the droids. But his boss Michelle Bradley (Sigourney Weaver) won't hear of it and meanwhile rival robot technician Vincent Moore (Hugh Jackman, who chooses to play most of his scenes wearing horribly unflattering khaki shorts) is frustrated because his giant enforcement robot Moose (think ED-209 from the

original *RoboCop*) is sitting gathering dust. Deon sneaks off with a recently-decommissioned damaged robot but he's hi-jacked by a bunch of gangsters and forced to reprogram the robot (renamed *CHAPPIE* by one of the gangsters because he's...a cheeky chappie) into a machine they can use to help them pull off robberies so they can pay off a debt to another gangster. Once reprogrammed, Chappie becomes a terrified, petulant, inquisitive child and, to say the least, a bit of a handful.

Technically *CHAPPIE* is a hugely impressive achievement. The robot him/itself is realised not by Motion Capture but largely by Copley acting out the role in a bodysuit before being overlaid with the beautifully detailed robot animation and once again Blomkamp has brought to the screen a gritty, grimy overpopulated Johannesburg riddled with crime, squalor and decay. The visual aesthetic is impeccable but the film stumbles because it's just so damned noisy and many of its lead characters are either deeply unlikable or just plain unsympathetic.

CHAPPIE himself is, frankly, an absolute pain in the robotic rear. Blomkamp regular Copley's physical performance

as *CHAPPIE* is wiry and angular but his vocal performance makes the creature so irritating you'll want to take a screwdriver (or even a blowtorch) to him as soon as he's up and about and running around screeching and wailing like a three-year-old drowning in a vat of Sunny Delight. Things get worse once he's press-ganged into service by a bunch of wild-eyed gangsters played by South African rap collective Die Antwoord - specifically lead singer Watkin Tudor Jones (calling himself Ninja) and 'band' member Yo-landi Visser. To call their performances terrible would be to enoble them and the film's soundtrack thunders with the cacophonous din of hardcore rap and metal which, to anyone who likes a nice tune where you can hear the words, is the living definition of purgatory.

So *CHAPPIE* is pretty much on the back foot from the outset with a lead character you want to hit over the head with a hammer and baddies who are little more than ranting, unbelievable caricatures. It's left to Dev Patel to struggle to give the film some emotional balance and Hugh Jackman to chew up the scenery as the sneery Moore who finally gets to play with his MOOSE (as it were) in the film's final act. And it's the final act where *CHAPPIE* finally flies (not literally). The action sequences here are frenetic and adrenalised and surprisingly violent and, extraordinarily, the climax even manages to engender some sympathy for *CHAPPIE* as his unchargeable battery begins to run out of power and he and Deon race against time to find another robotic host for his artificial consciousness.

In the final analysis, *CHAPPIE* isn't totally crappy but it's just too scrappy for an audience to be happy with its exploration of the nature of AI and - groan - what it means to be human. Beneath all the noise and fury, which presently signify nothing, there's probably a mature and thought-provoking story waiting to be told but it's lost in a welter of bad acting, simplistic moralising and a robot star who makes *Futurama*'s Bender look like a model of sophistication and contemplative restraint. Enjoy Blomkamp's stylish direction, the awesome FX and the last fifteen minutes; the rest of the film, like *CHAPPIE* himself, can cheerfully be consigned to the scrapheap.

Extras: Eight featurettes / Scene deconstruction / Extended scene / Alternate ending / Photo gallery

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★ 5



JONATHAN STRANGE AND MR NORRELL

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TOBY HAYNES / SCREENPLAY: PETER HARNESSE / STARRING: EDDIE MARSAN, BERTIE CARVEL, CHARLOTTE RILEY, MARC WARREN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

British fantasy, Doctor Who aside, doesn't always get the attention it deserves. Poke around online geek circles and you'll see a lot of chatter about swanky American productions like *Game of Thrones*, but not so many of us seem to have been watching *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, a seven-part miniseries from our very own BBC. Which is a shame, as it's really rather good, and hardly lacking in ambition...

Based on Susanna Clarke's novel, *Strange and Norrell*

begins in England, 1806 – as the Napoleonic wars rage on, magic, which was widely practiced three hundred years ago, has fallen into disuse. Enter our title characters, the two magicians who will bring magic back to England. The thing is, they can't always get on. Norrell (Marsan) is a scholar, believing no spell should be performed until dozens of related books have been thoroughly studied, while his pupil Strange (Carvel) just wants to skip straight to the cool stuff. It's high

school chemistry all over again...

Thanks to top performances from the dashing Carvel and the more restrained Marsan, plus a great script from Peter Harness (*Doctor Who*, *Wallander*), the shifting power dynamic between the two leads is the heart of the series; it's a friendship torn apart by Norrell's conservatism and Strange's daring, as his willingness to really dabble in the risky stuff allows Strange to rise through the ranks and soon become the Duke of Wellington's favoured magician.

A wide range of fascinating characters surround these two; there's the street magician with his odd prophecies, the politician's wife who goes insane after returning from the dead, the enslaved butler told he's destined for greatness, and to really muck things up, there's a fairy on the loose, with a ludicrously large quiff that makes it clear his intentions can't be good.

It's an expansive tale, taking place over many years and in many countries, and it's clearly

had good money thrown at it, looking very nice for a BBC production (better even than some of the more ambitious *Doctor Who* episodes). The first episode's set piece in the beautiful York Minster sets the tone, but it's the later Battle of Waterloo sequence that really sticks in the mind; kudos here goes to the very impressive VFX work and to director Toby Haynes (another *Who* alumni).

Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell is a great achievement for the BBC – a gripping, stylish miniseries, full of weird and wonderful characters, that's worthy of being ranked alongside *Game of Thrones* as the best genre television of the year. Now it's out on DVD and Blu-ray, shut down Netflix for a few hours and give British fantasy the love it deserves.

Extras: *BTS Feature / Deleted Scenes / Bloopers*

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



QUATERMASS

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: PIERS HAGGARD / SCREENPLAY: NIGEL KNEALE / STARRING: JOHN MILLS, SIMON MACCORKINDALE, MARGARET TYZACK, BARBARA KELLERMAN / RELEASE DATE: JULY 27TH

Twenty years after his final appearance in *Quatermass and the Pit* in 1959, Bernard Quatermass returned to British TV for one more adventure in 1979. But this was to be a very different *Quatermass* in a story which, although written in the late 1960s for a proposed fourth BBC serial, absolutely reflects the worries and concerns of a grim, industrial decade riven by strife, unemployment, austerity and a growing sense of public unrest and despair. TV dystopias have rarely been as unrelentingly bleak as *Quatermass*, a story which again pits Bernard, now long-since retired and living in splendid isolation in Scotland, against a ruthless alien intelligence.

Somewhere in the last quarter of the twentieth century,

a melodramatic voiceover tells us, "the whole world seemed to sicken... as if some primal disorder was reasserting itself." Civilisation, it seems, is hanging by a thread. Law and order gone to pot, the UK on its knees, its population disenfranchised; rubble-strewn, decaying streets ruled by vicious machine-gun toting thugs and muggers and power-cuts are common place. *Quatermass* comes to London in search of his granddaughter, who, he suspects, has fallen under the spell of the hippy-like *Planet People* who believe that their destiny lies in the stars and that they will be transported to a harmonious new world. *Quatermass* meets up with scientist Joe Kapp (MacCorkindale), who

is monitoring anomalous space transmissions from his countryside radio telescope. But when hundreds of *Planet People* congregating at a nearby stone circle known as Ringstone Round are vaporised by a beam of light, *Quatermass* soon realises that the planet is again under attack from some mysterious alien force...

Time has been surprisingly kind to *Quatermass* – helped, of course, by this stunningly sharp new Blu-ray transfer. The four episodes not only encapsulate the concerns of the time it was made, but many of them seem just as relevant today as society becomes increasingly fragmented and directionless. *Quatermass* himself is no longer the figure of authority he was in his glory days; now he's old, tired and he finds himself bounced between various factions as reports of similar cullings taking place around the world lead him to realise the true scale of the disaster facing mankind.

Quatermass is wonderfully atmospheric stuff and Euston Films, who produced the series for ITV, made the most of their then-generous £1.25 million budget. Urban sequences look grubby and run-down, motorways are littered with abandoned cars and bodies and whilst it's hardly an effects-driven piece, there's something cold and chilling about the glowing beam

of light which arcs down from the sky to turn the pitiful *Planet People* into dust. A sequence set in the now-demolished Wembley Stadium is hauntingly realised and genuinely disturbing; the atmosphere turned green due to the sheer number of young people vaporised all across the world. Mills invests *Quatermass* with a wonderful bewildered weariness, yet the old genius is never far from the surface and he retains the twinkling brilliance of his younger days when he finally assembles a team of scientists and works with them to suggest the only possible resolution.

Quatermass in 1979, as it was in the 1950s, is intelligent and thoughtful sci-fi for adults. It's uncompromising – core characters are killed off dispassionately and apparently arbitrarily – and although pacing issues might leave a modern audience slightly restless, it's utterly gripping, immersive and, despite its provenance in the 1970s, surprisingly timeless if not timely. A slice of classic British genre television to cherish.

Extras: *Music-only tracks for all four episodes, episode recaps, textless titles, image gallery, theatrical version restoration, souvenir booklet*

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



UNHALLOWED GROUND

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: RUSSELL ENGLAND / SCREENPLAY: PAUL RASCHID / STARRING: AMEET CHANA, MARCUS GRIFFITHS, POPPY DRAYTON, WILL THORP / RELEASE DATE: JULY 27TH

Admire, if you will, the lovely and spooky cover of this half-baked British horror thriller. See the moody image of some ramshackle house in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by gravestones and with a bloody axe buried in a stump of wood. Then watch the film and wonder why not one of these things appears in the film. Which is, in fact, set in and around a mansion-like

boarding school in the middle of the English countryside. This misleading practice is pretty much par for the course for the direct-to-DVD horror market and once again we're promised a moodier and creepier film than the one we actually get when we press 'play'.

We're at the clumsily-named but rambling Dhoultham School, where six promising students from local institutes

for posh rich kids, as part of their military training, are instructed to spend the night patrolling the building and its grounds. Unfortunately, the building is in the process of being infiltrated by two inept Home Alone-style burglars intent on snaffling some of the school's secret artefacts and, just to make the night really special, there are supernatural doings afoot. 350 years earlier, a bunch of kids entered into a terrible pact with the devil to preserve the school from the ravages of the Black Death sweeping across the country. Typically, they've chosen tonight to resurrect themselves and a Satanic figure is stalking the corridors too, looking for payback...

Unhallowed Ground isn't especially awful, but it's also not hugely accomplished. The whole set-up is doomed thanks to an unconvincing and fairly lifeless script, which settles far too often for awkward and unsubtle expository bouts of info-dumping, seriously dodgy acting, deeply unsympathetic characters and, worst of all, horribly unscary scares. Ghouls pop up now and again with silly

glowing eyes like extras from a 1980s Duran Duran video and only the manifestation of the Devil with his cowl and beak-like proboscis looks even remotely alarming - but possibly for all the wrong reasons entirely.

By the final act, just as our interest is draining away through our boots (other footwear is available), the film tries to muster up a few surprises as a couple of the characters turn out to be not quite what we've been led to believe (don't worry about spoilers - you really won't care either way). Sadly, it's too little too late to save a film which has been mostly marking time and failing to deliver even the most simplistic scares or shocks. But despite its failings, it's occasionally quite smartly directed and Burglar No. 1, Will Thorp, is an agreeable enough psychopath. It still seems quite likely that the film advertised on the cover would have been a better bet though...

PAUL MOUNT

+++++ 4



HOUSEBOUND

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GERARD JOHNSTONE / STARRING: MORGANA O'REILLY, RIMA TE WIATA, GLEN-PAUL WARU, ROSS HARPER / RELEASE DATE: JULY 20TH

Writer/director Gerard Johnstone's Housebound has all the hallmarks of a great horror comedy. A traditional haunted house tale with likeable quirky characters and typically dry Antipodean humour, this is actually a film of two halves.

Kylie Bucknell (O'Reilly) is sentenced to eight months house arrest after using dynamite to blow up an ATM. A stable and loving environment would be more beneficial than prison, decides the judge, which speaks volumes of the New Zealand judicial system. Unfortunately for Kylie, the stable and loving environment she is forced into is

the home of her mother, Miriam (Te Wiata), a well-meaning but superstitious gossip who has a penchant for phoning late night radio talk shows and who is convinced the house is haunted.

It isn't long before Kylie also begins to experience otherworldly shenanigans and this is where much of the comedy is derived. If a door keeps mysteriously opening what do you do? Why, take the door off its hinges of course.

First time director Johnstone clearly has fun paying homage to the tropes that horror fans are so familiar with; the aforementioned opening doors, mysterious

noises, a split-second glimpse of a figure that suddenly vanishes, the creepy possum-skinning next door neighbour and a sinister talking toy teddy that just won't shut up despite the damage inflicted upon it. He also understands how to pace such a film, which initially is a slow burn, with the tension building imperceptibly, so that before long you realise that you've buttock-shuffled right to the edge of your seat.

The performances by the entire cast are faultless. O'Reilly excels at portraying a thoroughly detestable Kylie, who cares for nobody but herself. She may be the one paying for her crime but so too do Miriam and her boyfriend, who feel as though they are prisoners in their own home. Kylie forces them upstairs to watch Coronation Street on a dilapidated portable TV and refuses to help with the chores. But as the strange occurrences become more menacing you can't help but feel sympathy for the girl.

Another notable performance is from Waru as Amos, a guard from the local security firm monitoring Kylie's detention who, rather than dismissing claims that the house is haunted, turns

out to be an enthusiast in paranormal investigation. This creates an unlikely but much-needed friendship that helps to humanise Kylie.

Unfortunately, the second half of the film loses its way and what was a ghost story becomes a slasher movie. This change is so sudden that it almost feels like watching an entirely different film albeit with the same characters. The chases and the gore effects are expertly orchestrated with a cheese grater and a washing basket used as weapons in a particularly imaginative way. But what started as an engaging and humorous supernatural tale is completely at odds with the final act, which has more in common with *Scream* or the myriad teen stalker/slasher movies that have saturated the multiplexes.

Johnstone is clearly capable of creating a traditional, effective haunted house story as well as a psycho killer movie. However, it would have been better to have had them as two separate movies rather than combining them into a single film.

CHRISTIAN JONES

+++++ 7



FALLEN SOLDIERS

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: BILL THOMAS / SCREENPLAY: BILL THOMAS, IAN THOMAS / STARRING: ROLAND BEARNE, ALEX BEVAN, EVE PEARSON / RELEASE DATE: JULY 27TH

Zombies have always been a bit of a boon to low-budget horror movies; they're a cheap and simple way to scare the wits out of an audience without the need for complicated special effects or too much exposition. The problem is that they're now so ubiquitous that a movie has to be rather clever and original to stand out from the mouldering horde of zombie features out there.

Its fortunate, then, that Napoleonic monster movie *Fallen Soldiers* happens to be rather smart. The setting is rather interesting; it's the 19th century and Britain is at war with the French. Anyone who's seen an episode of *Sharpe* knows the score here; the French are the evil conniving baddies and the British are the plucky upstarts who are very good at over-the-top violence.

In *Fallen Soldiers*, Napoleon's forces have a sinister secret weapon, and it's of the glassy-eyed shambling sort.

This is a costume and practical effects-heavy feature, and very much old school. There are a lot of low-budget horror movies on the market and *Fallen Soldiers* has played it very smart with period props and careful use of its monsters. All the locations are fields, woodlands, camp fires and small enclosed spaces, giving a distinctive look to the piece that suits its setting.

Every penny can be seen on the screen, and the action scenes are tightly directed. Shortcuts have been avoided; instead a lot of work has gone into making each scene look strong, and though this is also a cost-saving measure, it really does make the feature look good and gives the entire project a traditional horror movie vibe.

Of course, all the careful shots and choreography in the world would be for nothing if the acting was poor. Luckily, the main leads carry off the dialogue-heavy plot very well.

The feature is framed as one person telling a story to a captive audience and, despite some over the top French accents, there are some impressive performances.

Fallen Soldiers is a great horror movie, with some strong talent and clever ideas. Nicely done, and we'd love to see what director Bill Thomas could do if he was actually given a budget.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8



MILANO CALIBRO 9

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: FERNANDO DI LEO / STARRING: GASTONE MOSCHIN, MARIO ADORF, BARBARA BOUCHET / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Milano Calibro 9 is a masterpiece of poliziotteschi; a frantic, high intensity crime thriller with a slightly gangster-tinged feel, all drenched in a deliciously apt soundtrack of energy, emotion and insatiable Italian chic.

The action centres on Ugo Piazza (Moschin), an ex-con who has just been released from prison and who is in the bad books of his former boss due to a large amount of missing cash. Adamant that he had nothing to do with the disappearance of the money, poor Ugo is set upon as soon as he gets out

of prison, with some heavies, led by Rocco (the excellently-moustachioed Adorf), drilling home the point that the big boss, "The Americano" (Lionel Stander), hasn't forgotten about his missing pieces of eight. In order to find out who really took the money, Ugo agrees to fall back into the world of crime and work alongside Rocco for *The Americano*. With tensions high and trust issues aplenty, *Milano Calibro 9* then unravels the type of story that makes for attention-monopolising viewing. Trust us, once you start watching the first of Di Leo's

Milieu Trilogy you won't be able to look away.

Fernando Di Leo, a true master of his craft, arguably never created anything better than *Milano Calibro 9*, itself inspired from the works of Giorgio Scerbanenco, and his shooting style is perfectly complemented by Amedeo Giomini's meticulously-timed editing and Goffredo Salvatori's pitch-perfect musical anecdotes. Of course, another key component to this beautifully crafted tale is the casting. With Moschin doing wonders as the understated Ugo and Barbara Bouchet dazzling as former flame Nelly, it's Adorf's amped-up, cocksure Rocco who devours every scene he's in, particularly when it involves playing off of Moschin's toned-down turn as Ugo. Added to this, every single supporting player is delivered sublimely, be they friends-turned-hitmen, former bosses, politically-angled lawmen or simply bar staff.

Milano Calibro 9 really is a joy to behold, with its inquisitive, probing narrative dragging you along on its murky journey through the corrupt and dangerous Milanese streets. Despite its obvious nature, the film remains relatively gore-free

yet manages to shock at regular intervals. Then there's a wide variety of tiny nuances which bring great attention to the detail of the film's key players yet manage to pass by under the radar, subtly advancing the plot as they go.

With this wonderfully restored Blu-ray release, there's also a glut of extras, some old, some new. Noteworthy bonus features are the making-of feature and the lookback on Fernando Di Leo's work within the genre, and the particular highlight of the extra content sees Garth Marenghi's *Darkplaces* writer, Matthew Holness, discuss the history of the poliziotteschi genre in general.

Simply put, fans of stunningly-constructed cinema need to add *Milano Calibro 9* to their collections at the earliest convenience. Equally, the same can be said for fans of fantastically-styled moustaches.

Extras: 'Calibro 9' making-of / 'Fernando Di Leo: The Genesis of the Genre' documentary / Two featurettes / Trailers / Collector's booklet

ANDREW POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 9



THE VOICES

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MARJANE SATRAPI / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL R. PERRY / STARRING: RYAN REYNOLDS, GEMMA ARTERTON, ANNA KENDRICK, JACKI WEAVER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When it comes to the world of film, the word ordinary can take on many meanings. When it comes to a film like *The Voices*, that word ceases to exist. There have been many sights the world of movies has blessed us with over the years - spaceships drifting in front of wormholes, dinosaur theme parks, and now the sight of Ryan Reynolds arguing with a profane Scottish-accented cat. As is common with the dark comedy genre, many will not take to Marjane Satrapi's (*Persepolis*) brand of humour. However, *The Voices* - whatever your own personal tastes - is an interesting, visually engaging film with a message beneath its gruesome eccentricity, and moreover, an absolute knockout

performance by Reynolds.

The Voices tells the story of a troubled but likeable factory worker, Jerry (Reynolds), who spends his time smiling at work and then going home and having a conversation with his pets (simples). However, when he pursues an office crush the disastrous results turn his life upside down. Not opening with absolute darkness, *The Voices* slowly develops into a tale of modern day mental illness treatment with jet-black humour. The film, with its posters promoting the talking animals aspect, is actually a lot more grounded than you might expect, with the outlandish elements of the story being explained by the distressed thoughts of

the lead character. Michael R. Perry's (mostly great) script does sometimes fail to strike the best balance of humour and darkness. However, those minor missteps are just that, minor, in a film that is mostly a very interesting contemplation on mental illness - asking whether the real world is the most upsetting place of all.

The film features many fine turns; Gemma Arterton as the party-prone British office worker Fiona; Anna Kendrick as the very considerate colleague Lisa; and Jacki Weaver as the (quite understanding) counsellor, Dr. Warren.

However, *The Voices* does come to be a showcase for Ryan Reynolds, who not only plays Jerry but also voices the pets - loving Dog Bosco and rather mean cat Mr. Whiskers (the movie's secret comedy weapons) - as his character's psyche is fragmented into more and more parts throughout the film. Jerry may be hard to sympathise with for many but Reynolds gives him a sense of helplessness, as he is a decent but lost soul, stranded amidst his unmediated thoughts and haunted by his cruel upbringing. Though heavy-handed at points, Jerry's story is in essence a cautionary tale about aiding mental health issues before it is too late. And in the lead, Reynolds delivers a calling card of a performance, which proves that, in spite of what many say, he is a very underrated actor.

The Voices may not match the best of the genre's output but with its visual embrace of the conflict between psychological fantasy and grim reality, the film is always interestingly painted and an outstandingly visual feature, recalling the palette of '60s suburbia and with the genre beats of *Inside No. 9* and *Psycho*. It is not perfect, the end is a tad spontaneous (although the end credits are fun), and often the balance of darkness and laughter is uneven. Still, especially for the right audiences, this is an enjoyable film, with a lot to say and whether you think it works or not, it is impossible to deny the vigour of Satrapi's film and likewise the exemplary performance by Reynolds.

All in all, *The Voices* is a film that makes an argument for honesty in mental health treatment but one which also tells an engaging and stylish age-old story of the conflict between light and darkness (which is often very well thought-out). Plus, there has never been a film to get into the mind of cats better than this one - demanding, swear-y and somewhat evil... but we love them!

Extras: Interviews / Two featurettes / Extended scenes / Deleted scenes

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



HOT TUB TIME MACHINE 2

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STEVE PINK / SCREENPLAY: JOSH HEALD / STARRING: ROB CORDDRY, CRAIG ROBINSON, CLARK DUKE, ADAM SCOTT / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 3RD

There's no beating around the bush: This is one of the worst sequels ever made.

It's almost as though Paramount and MGM farmed out the project to Syfy Kings The

Asylum to write and produce.

Everyone is back from the first film (sans John Cusack, unsurprisingly. The stories going around are he didn't want to do the sequel because it

was a bad script, or he simply wasn't asked. Either way, we'd consider it a wise choice). Using their knowledge of the future, Lou (Corddry) has become a rock star with his group 'Motley Lou' and a billionaire having invented his own version of Google, aptly named 'Louggle'. Nick (Robinson) is now also a famous recording artist, having stolen popular songs from musicians in the future, while Jacob (Duke) is Lou's butler and Adam Jr. (Scott) turns up as the illegitimate son of Cusack's character from the first film.

However, when an unknown assailant kills Lou at one of his parties, the team takes to their trusty hot tub to travel through time in an attempt to find his murderer. They find themselves in 2025, and then spend more time travelling back and forth trying to fix the things they

caused improving their lot in life

There are a few minor, funny moments and sight gags involving the aged time travellers in the future; it has lots of shameless gutter humor involving testicles, and a homoerotic contest called Choosy Doozy. There are some customary cameos popping up within the film, including a blink-and-you-miss him one involving Chevy Chase as the hot tub repairman.

Einstein would have a brain hemorrhage trying to figure out the illogical time travel paradoxes seen here, many of which seem to be borrowed from *Back to the Future 2*. Then again, any normal person could risk that problem, too, watching this dreck.

WHITNEY SCOTT BAIN

★★★★★★★★★★ 3



THE HOUSE WITH 100 EYES

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JAY LEE, JIM ROOF / SCREENPLAY: JIM ROOF / STARRING: JIM ROOF, SHANNON MALONE, LARISSA LYNCH, LIZ BURGHODORF / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The hundred eyes of the title are CCTV cameras, relaying much of the film's action to its audience. It is found footage, then, but has enough gimmicks up its sleeve that it doesn't feel hampered by the format. As such, it's one of the only found footage horror films that manages to bypass a question as old as *Cannibal Holocaust* and *The Blair Witch*

Project – why are they still filming when it all falls apart? Because, by the time it's too late, it's out of the characters' hands.

The plot, then. A husband-and-wife serial killing duo, amassing a collection of homemade snuff videos, indulge in a snuff threesome (fivesome?), picking up a young lad and two girls straight from the street. The

torture chamber beckons, but what our murderous man-and-wife haven't reckoned on is the human survival instinct. What follows is a brutal fight for life, with neither party guaranteed (or even likely to achieve) to succeed. Whatever the case, those hundred eyes are on hand to capture it all, for better or worse.

What could have been but a simple dull torture movie is enlivened by a frequently inventive streak; from the purposefully cheesy and stilted video introductions of killers Ed and Susan, to the armless, legless woman kept captive in a pet carrier, cheerily grinning her way through the movie. As Ed, writer/co-director/lead actor Jim Roof channels the look and act of magnetically repulsive *Hot Tub Time Machine* star, Rob Corddry. Like Corddry, he's endlessly irritating for every moment of his screentime but undeniably watchable. Shannon Malone gets less to play with as Susan, but she's a fine foil to his mania. The kids

are perfectly serviceable, doing what they have to do (die, mostly) well enough.

The House with 100 Eyes is smart, well-done horror filmmaking. Its style and story won't be to everyone's tastes – it's thoroughly unpleasant, a torture film through and through – and it struggles with its tone, but it does manage to transcend its limitations to create something a little bit special.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★ 7



FESTIVAL OF THE SPOKEN NERD: FULL FRONTAL NERDITY

DVD / CERT: 12 / STARRING: MATT PARKER, STEVE MOULD, HELEN ARNEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Science has come a long way in terms of pop culture creditability. After decades of well-meaning-yet-stuffy attempts at making this crucial discipline interesting to the general public, shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and *The Infinite Monkey Cage* hit upon a formula. Make 'em laugh and if that fails, wheel on the explosions. The Festival of the Spoken Nerd is a team of three comedians who are also all about the nerdy love of maths, spreadsheets, physics and puns. Their latest show, *Full Frontal Nerdity*, is unashamedly

nerdy, as the title suggests. It's for those of us who tend to laugh straight away at XKCD cartoons or have a collection of puns based around the word ion. The main attraction is their 100-minute long show, which is a mix of stand-up comedy, practical demonstrations and the odd song or two.

The show can be broken down by performer. Helen Arney's act seems to mostly consist of sweetly sarcastic songs with a vague scientific basis, some more involved than others. Though they seem a little strained at

times, the songs also have lovely accompanying footage and are rather fun. Certainly fans of the likes of Jonathan Coulton or The Doubleclicks will enjoy these pieces quite a lot. Matt Parker's act seems mostly based around maths, spreadsheets and the fact that the performer's persona is that of a total dork. He fills the stage with the nervous energy of someone who knows some terribly important things about the world but can't quite explain it all to you. This, combined with some rather silly practical demonstrations, makes for more than a few good laughs.

Steve Mould has a similar sort of act, though his focus is more on interesting natural phenomena. The most laid back of the three, he also happens to have a genuine scientific discovery named after him, a fact that he mines for as many laughs as he can get. His laconic wit and strong presence holds the other two together, rounding off the act quite nicely. The Festival of the Spoken Nerd is often at its funniest when they're bickering between each other, again, to great comedic effect.

The set includes a booklet (which is nicely packed with jokes and references to the show) and an additional disc with mockumentaries and

music videos. They're a nice bonus making an already strong product almost unmissable.

If you like nerd humour, or you know someone who does, you should take a look at Festival of the Spoken Nerd: Full Frontal Nerdity. It's great fun for geeks.

Extras: 85-minutes of extras (inc. 'Backstage Nerdity', 'The Mould Effect Effect', music videos and science features) / Subtitles (inc. Klingon and Binary) / Director's Commentary / Director's Commentary of Director's Commentary / American Language Soundtrack / Slightly Safer for Schools Soundtrack / 20-page booklet

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8





JUPITER ASCENDING

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ANDY WACHOWSKI, LANA WACHOWSKI / STARRING: CHANNING TATUM, MILA KUNIS, EDDIE REDMAYNE, SEAN BEAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Jupiter Ascending contains one extremely rare cinematic event: Sean Bean surviving to the end! Spoiler perhaps?

In truth, nothing could be said in this review that would prepare you for the preposterous sci-fi porn that The Wachowskis have unleashed on an unprepared world. Supercharged dog soldiers (we'll get to that) and toilet-cleaning royalty populate this shamelessly over-the-top space opera that wants desperately to be The Matrix meets Alice in Wonderland but ends up being something else entirely. Think more Titan A.E. spliced with a little John Carter.

While cleaning houses

with her family, Jupiter Jones (Kunis) learns that she is the recurrence (think exact physical reincarnation without the cerebral connection) of intergalactic nobility. As she's the only one who can prevent Earth becoming part of some huge cosmic industry, her life is in danger and she must rely on help from former legionnaire extraordinaire Caine Wise (Tatum), a man who shares DNA with a wolf, to save the population.

Despite the multitude of issues with Jupiter Ascending, including the cosmetically-inspired central plot, there is one thing it certainly does not lack and that is ambition. Marvel's

Guardians of the Galaxy has proven without doubt that audiences are prepared to accept fantastical concepts and bizarre characters if they are made to empathise with them, to feel something when they win or lose. With Jupiter Ascending, the overriding feeling you have while watching is that everything is just unfathomably stupid. The characters are so shallow that only a ridiculous amount of overacting (we're looking at you, Eddie Redmayne) or stereotypical brooding (Tatum) can generate even a flicker of interest. As for the dialogue, the now infamous "I like dogs" scene will haunt movie highlights shows for years to come and must give poor Mila Kunis nightmares.

The sad thing is that, despite or even because of the stupidity, Jupiter Ascending is actually pretty good fun. Stunning, although at times confusing, visuals give vibrant life to the off-world settings, the spaceships are beautifully designed with indulgent grandeur and there is some interesting originality to be found in the film's 'splicing' theories; although Sean Bean's Stinger doesn't seem to benefit too much from his connection with bees. Go with it and this is a film that can be enjoyed

for its failings and there can be no argument concerning the bravery of its filmmakers.

Given the spectacular nature of the film, this Blu-ray disappointingly only comes with several standard featurettes that offer only a very routine peek behind the curtain of the filmmaking process. Many years ago, when a 'making of' program would appear on television for Star Wars and the like, it would be filled with industry secrets and insider information. Today, with the abundance of material now available, the extras on a DVD need to offer something new and, apart from several interesting interview pieces with the Wachowskis, nothing here offers any real insight.

Jupiter Ascending is without doubt the auteur directors' most Wizard of Oz-influenced film to date, with themes of home and belonging to the fore, but perhaps these more obvious references are to the film's detriment. This isn't a boring film, the ridiculousness of the performances will engage you if nothing else, but it isn't as good as it could and should have been.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★★★★★ 5



GIRLHOUSE

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JON KNAUTZ, TREVOR MATTHEWS / SCREENPLAY: NICK GORDON / STARRING: ALI COBRIN, ADAM DIMARCO, SLAINE, ALYSON BATH / RELEASE DATE: JULY 20TH

The slasher movie has long been in decline. In its '80s heyday, slasher films were a dime-a-dozen, with new titles popping up almost every week, with a diverse range of quality. For every classic there were a dozen duds. As a result, apart from the odd remake, sequel or occasional attempt at a new franchise, we don't see many anymore - but GirlHouse is

recreating those gravy train moments once again....

Set in the eponymous house, which is also an online porn site where members can request that the girls do anything in front of the cameras that stands within reason - and there are cameras everywhere - a new girl, Kylie (Ali Cobrin), joins and immediately the viewers take

a liking to her. One member in particular, Loverboy (Slaine), takes a fancy to her. Only problem is Loverboy has serious girl issues stemming from when he was a child and does not deal well with rejection or being belittled.

Although the house is in a secret location and has the best security that money can buy, Loverboy has some very handy IT skills and manages to work out where both the house and control centres are. After being made to feel small, he decides to don a psycho killer costume, that just so happens to hang in his basement, and kill everyone involved in the website and house as brutally as he can. Only an amorous friend of Kylie's in the real world can hope to find the house and stop the massacre before it's too late.

There are some slightly uncomfortable moments of voyeurism that make you wonder if you should be watching this, but the gratuitous nudity is kept to a minimum and the kills are impressively nasty. Let's just say that Loverboy is in no

way subtle when it comes to dispatching his victims, male and female. Interestingly, the girls aren't bitchy towards each other as you'd probably expect them to be, and so apart from the token drug addict you actually feel a bit sad as each one gets picked off.

If you have fond memories of the titillating and gore-laden '80s slasher films, of which this is a pretty good homage, then you should find something to entertain you here.

JD GILLAM

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



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come from the game's first two entries, which are obviously the most iconic, but there are also quite a few from Part 7. The picture disc should be available exclusively from Hot Topic as you read this.

While not officially genre fare, the score for the documentary **I Am Big Bird** is out digitally via Varèse Sarabande. The music is by Joshua Johnson, who last did **The Maze Runner**, and while a documentary about a man in a bird suit might seem a little outside our usual wheelhouse, the topic being Caroll Spinney, who has been **Sesame Street**'s Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch since 1969, we think you'll all want to check it out. The score's also a very interesting change of pace from Johnson's **Maze Runner** score, being sweetly simple, rather than bombastically complex.

Schema's releasing the score to director Luigi Scattini's mondo film **Angeli bianchi... angeli neri** (better known in the English-speaking world as **Witchcraft '70**). The music is by Scattini's frequent composer, Piero Umiliani, and it's typically lush, although tinged with a sense of evil and foreboding – unsurprising, given the aim of the movie was to 'document the world of black magic, devil worshipping and pagan rituals.'

La-La Land dropped a ton of amazing genre reissues last month, starting with two instalments of Mark Snow's **Millennium**. The show's starting to get a bit of reconsideration in the wake of **The X-Files** reboot, and thus, more music is unsurprising. There's a reissue of Volume 1, which is identical in design and content to the original 2008 release, with the only difference the words 'Limited Edition of 1000 Units' printed on the tray card. Volume 2, however, is a brand-new 2-CD compilation, and featuring extensive liner notes. The company also reissued Horner's **Commando**, which is also identical to the original, save for a 'Limited Edition' notice on the back. The same goes for another Horner reissue, **Krull**.

La-La Land's release of new music comes in the form of the score for Armory Films' **Zombeavers**, which has gotten crazy positive feedback from fans. The score, by the film's writers Al and Jon Kaplan, is by all accounts a complete pastiche of every horror and comedy trope out there, yet much like the low-budget film to which it's attached, it works. You can get it as a digital download or limited-edition CD, which includes three bonus tracks not on the download.

Death Waltz Recording Company dropped a couple of new releases with minimal fanfare last month. First was Alessandro Blonksteiner's score for the rather strange, but exceedingly excellent 1980

We lost a great one last month, with the passing of James Horner when his plane crashed in California. The Los Angeles-born composer was famous the world over for his Academy Award-winning score to James Cameron's box office leviathan **Titanic**, as well as **Braveheart** and **Apollo 13**, but genre fans love him just as much for his work on Cameron's **Aliens**. Along with other cult and underground films in his early days, such as **Wolfen** and **Deadly Blessing**, Horner's work went even further into genre territory with the likes of **Willow**. Horner's last work will be heard later this year in the films **Southpaw** and **The 33**.

If you have a ridiculous amount of shelf space, and an equivalently large amount of money burning a hole in your pocket, Walt Disney Records and Fairfax Classics have one heck of a box-set available for pre-order next month. **The Silly Symphony Collection** features the complete restored soundtracks from all 75 **Silly Symphony** shorts. The 16-LP set comes in 8 tip-on gatefold jackets housed in a foil-stamped and numbered slipcase. J.B. Kaufman and Russell Merritt provide liner notes and I cannot believe that this is happening. It's like a gigantic, gorgeous

piece of artwork to which you can listen.

If you've not had a chance to pick up the soundtrack for the retro-'80s YouTube phenomenon **Kung Fury**, the music by Mitch Murder and others is now available both digitally and on red vinyl. The music apes the cheesy '80s aesthetic even better than the film, right down to an amazing David Hasselhoff cut, **True Survivor**. We spoke with Murder (also known as Johan Bengtsson) about the score, and he had this to say about its hissy, distressed sound:

*"Even though I make '80s music, I usually tend to try and keep it 'fresh' sounding, like it was mixed and recorded last week, and not rely on effects and filters, et cetera, to deliberately try and make it sound old and worn out (with a few exceptions). With **Kung Fury**, it was different, since the entire style of the film is sort of 'lost VHS tape from 1984', which is why a couple of the tracks have those wonky old worn-out tape effects here and there."*

While all the music from **Mega Man** saw release digitally last year via Sumthing Else Music Works, it looks like Spacelab9 will be releasing an LP with 22 tracks 'hand-picked by the Capcom Sound Team themselves' from **Mega Man** instalments 1-10. The majority

Antonio Margheriti film, **Cannibal Apocalypse**. Blonkstein didn't do much work, but if you enjoy strange but funky guitar work mixed with beautiful piano melodies, you will do well to get this. Death Waltz's release of **Cannibal Apocalypse** clues us in via its obi strip that the label now has slated **The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave**, as composed by Bruno Nicolai. The 1971 Emilio Miraglia giallo has its charms, and Nicolai's score is certainly one of the highlights. It had a 2005 Digitmovies release on compact disc, but this marks the score's first appearance on vinyl.

Mondo paired up with Italy's Beat Records to put out Lucio Fulci's **Horror & Thriller Compilation**, which is both an excellent introduction to the music of Fulci's films for the novice, as well as a frustrating release for collectors and fans of the director. The double LP set features two Fulci scores which have never had a vinyl release: Giovanni Cristiani's **Demonia**, and Franco Piana's **Door to Silence**. The downside is that the rest of the music, with the exception of Fabio Frizzi's **Manhattan Baby**, has all seen re-release in recent years: selections from Frizzi's **The Beyond**, Ennio Morricone's **Lizard in a Woman's Skin**, Walter Rizzati's **The House by the Cemetery**, and **The New York Ripper** by Franco De Masi.

Mondo will also be releasing a double vinyl LP of Michael Giacchino's **Jurassic World** score. Giacchino's clever melding of old and new does the same with John Williams' original score as he did with Jerry Goldsmith's **Planet of the Apes** for **Dawn of the Planet of the Apes**. That release is currently up for pre-order but doesn't ship until September.

Lunaris Records announced their forthcoming release of vinyl and cassette version for **The Barn** score, by Rocky Gray. There's no official release date for either the movie – from Nevermore Production Films – or the score, but the trailer for the film looks absolutely bonkers. We're eagerly awaiting both if the online snippets are any indication of what to expect.

20th Century Fox released **X-Men: Days of Future Past – The Rogue Cut** earlier this month, which not only features 17 minutes of additional footage, including the cut-for-time subplot featuring Rogue, but further music by composer John Ottman. Sony Classical Records released a companion **Rogue Cut** score, which is a 2-CD set, featuring nearly two hours of music, and nearly double the tracks of the original



score. It also omits the Roberta Flack and Jim Croce songs from the first release. Given how enjoyable Ottman's score was, we can't wait to hear what interesting things he did with Anna Paquin's character and her rescue storyline. The music is also available as a digital download.

Finally, we spoke with Tony Giles and Scott Johannsson, the hosts of **The Damn Fine Podcast**, a new and excellent film score podcast which started back in April. The hosts have a genial conviviality that makes it worth listening, even for the most casual fan, but their in-depth commentary is also appealing to the die-hard. Recent highlights include a lengthy Q&A with composer Craig Safan, which might be their best work to date. We asked Giles and Johannsson how the podcast came to be:

"I guess it was because I was intrigued by the idea of having a radio show, and I hadn't yet heard a soundtrack-centric podcast like the one I had in mind," explains

Giles. *"It was a case of following through with the idea and finding someone who could help realise it."*

That's where Johannsson came in, whom Giles had met through the Spin the Blackest Circles vinyl forum. They seemed to have a lot of the same scores and composers in common, and so started talking.

Given that, as big as the soundtrack market is, it's a niche within a niche, so it's impressive that **The Damn Fine Podcast** has grown as quickly as it has, *"Which, I think, speaks to the fact that the community is quite a tight-knit one and is constantly looking for a place to share its passions and interests,"* Johannsson says of the podcast's rapid growth.

The program focuses mainly on vinyl releases – no surprise, given that the show's sponsor is the online record shop owned by Giles, Shipping Records – but the pair haven't ruled out the possibility of more options, *"The focus of the show will always be primarily vinyl, but that's not to say we won't spotlight digital or tape releases which really excite us,"* Giles says. *"For instance, Pentagram Home Video is a fantastic project that's currently a series of tape releases, but we know that Death Waltz has plans to release material by them at some point."*

"I'm personally very keen for us to stay vinyl focused, because this isn't a passing fad for me - I've collected and listened to records since I was a teen, nearly 30 years now, and it's firmly my medium of choice," concludes Johannsson. *"But I agree with Tony: it's cool that we can use the podcast also to tell listeners about upcoming music which isn't yet on vinyl."*

The Damn Fine Podcast can be found online via iTunes or Soundcloud.



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The Kitschies Open for Submissions

The Kitschies have announced the opening of submissions for books published in the UK in 2015, and new people have also been added to the prestigious panel of judges. Publishers from the full range of the industry have until midnight November 1st, 2015 to submit their works. Books have to have been first published in the United Kingdom between January 1st and December 31st, 2015. Previous winners include Lauren Beukes, China Miéville, Karen Lord, Ruth Ozeki, Kameron Hurley and Patrick Ness. The judges for the Red and Golden Tentacles, for novels and debut novels, are Sarah Lotz, James Smythe, Nikesh Shukla, Nazia Khatun, and Glen Mehn.

MISS FISHER MURDER MYSTERIES to Become Interactive Novel

Cult period detective drama **Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries** is to become a work of interactive fiction, thanks to app developers Tin Man Games. The TV series, featuring **Babadook** star Essie Davies, has made the highly successful thrillers an international phenomena. The hybrid game/novel will be loosely based on the books by Kerry Greenwood with games designer and writer Luke Miller will be in charge of emulating Greenwood's unique style. No doubt fans can't wait to take on the role of the famous independent, feminist super-sleuth.

New Category Proposed for Hugo Awards

Members of the World Science Fiction Society are currently planning to introduce a new award into the Hugo Awards. The award for Best Series would cover a work of science fiction or fantasy, presented as a single series with a unifying plot, characters, or setting, appearing in at least three volumes consisting of a total of at least 240,000 words by the close of the previous calendar year, at least one of which was published in the previous calendar year. A related proposal would prevent works from being nominated for more than one thing. Both these changes require an amendment to the WSFS Constitution, and will be confirmed at Worldcon later this year.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

HARRY POTTER AND THE CURSED CHILD to Hit the West End

J. K. Rowling has stated that the play **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child** will open in the West End next year. The project was originally proposed in 2013, but until recently, news on its development has been scarce. The play will tell a new story, using the characters from the Harry Potter novels. It is the result of a collaboration between writer Jack Thorne, director John Tiffany and Rowling herself. She said: *"I don't want to say too much more, because I don't want to spoil what I know will be a real treat for fans. However, I can say that it is not a prequel."* The story is designed to work specifically for stage productions. It will be produced by Sonia Friedman.

Ray Bradbury's Home Turned into Bookends

The home of **Fahrenheit 451** and **Something Wicked This Way Comes** author Ray Bradbury was demolished at the start of this year, much to the consternation of the sci-fi literature community. Fans had hoped to preserve the author's Los Angeles home following his death in 2012, however the site was purchased by an architect looking to build a home for his family. All is not lost, however; rubble recyclers The Reuse People of America were able to get salvage timber from author's old home. The wood has been turned into charming bookends (each with '451F' etched on them), and sold to booklovers. Some of the profits from this sale are to be donated to the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies at Indiana University to help fund the re-creation of Bradbury's home office.

Gaiman to Write Episodes of AMERICAN GODS TV Series

Neil Gaiman confirmed via Twitter that he will be writing episodes of the TV series adaptation of his book, **American Gods**. The bulk of the episodes will be written and produced by Brian 'Hannibal' Fuller and Michael 'Gotham' Green. It is understood that Gaiman will write for the show "somewhere down the line". The series will be aired on the Starz network and no release date has been set as yet.

Voting Now Open for the Chesley Awards

The Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists (ASFFA) have announced its shortlist for the 2015 Chesley Awards, and voting is now open to members of ASFFA. There are three categories for Best Cover Illustration (Hardback, Paperback and Magazine) as well as a wide variety of other awards, including Best Three Dimensional Art and Best Art Director. The winners will be announced during Sasquan, the 73rd World Science Fiction Convention.

Single Issues of Marvel Comics Come to Kindle

Amazon have made arrangements to allow 12000 single-issues of Marvel comic books to be available on their Kindle store. This comes as part of the deal arranged through Amazon owned company, comiXology. The US-based digital book platform will still continue to make Marvel's books available on all other platforms. ComiXology is also the engine that powers the Marvel Comics app, which it created with Marvel after becoming part of Amazon.

COMING SOON



SAGA VOLUME 5

AUTHOR: BRIAN K. VAUGHAN
PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 15TH

Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples' utterly unforgettable comic book series continues with Volume 5 of **Saga**. Described by some as 'Star Wars For Perverts', **Saga** has it all, including romance, galactic civil wars, wooden starships, magic and androids with televisions for heads. If you're looking forward to a movie

adaptation, you're in for a long wait; Vaughan has stated that **Saga** will only ever be available in graphic novel form. It's well worth your time so get into **Saga** now, before all your friends do.



XEELEE: ENDURANCE

AUTHOR: STEPHEN BAXTER
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 17TH

Stephen Baxter returns to his eon-spanning and universe-crossing conflict between humanity and the unknowable alien Xeelee in this new compilation. Spanning tales that chart the earliest days of man's adventure to the stars to stories of Old Earth, four billion years in the future, this collection shows Baxter's rich and detailed world to its full extent. Mankind will endure, despite the alien menace. Containing eleven short stories, some of which are novella length, this promises to be a tantalising glimpse into Baxter's imagination.



SORCERER TO THE CROWN

AUTHOR: ZEN CHO
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 10TH

In his latest book, fantastic creator Zen Cho introduces us to Zacharias Wythe, England's first African Sorcerer Royal. He is Regency London's leader of the Royal Society of Unnatural Philosophers. Sadly, he has many enemies, some of whom want his job, many of whom just want him dead. With the Fairy Court blocking its supply of magic to the Empire, England's magical stores are dwindling. Worse still, the government is demanding to use this scarce resource in its war with France.



A BETTER WAY TO DIE: COLLECTED SHORT STORIES

AUTHOR: PAUL CORNELL
PUBLISHER: NEWCON PRESS
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 28TH

Paul Cornell is very highly regarded for his diverse and clever fiction. If it's not TV scripts for the likes of **Doctor Who**, comics for both Marvel and DC, or critically acclaimed urban fantasy, then it's short stories. Cornell has worked with the equally well-loved

Ian Whates to produce a staggering collection of short stories, including the tale **One of Our Bastards is Missing**, which has already been nominated for a Hugo.



THE SHEPHERD'S CROWN

AUTHOR: TERRY PRATCHETT
PUBLISHER: DOUBLEDAY CHILDRENS
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 27TH

The last ever Terry Pratchett novel, **The Shepherd's Crown**, is on its way. The book will feature the much-loved teenage witch, Tiffany Aching, the hugely popular character who appeared in **The Wee Free Men**, **A Hat Full of Sky**, **Wintersmith**, and **I Shall Wear Midnight**. The Aching series is all about growing up and coming to terms with life changes, and we firmly suspect that this one will require an box of extra strong tissues. Get it quick and read it as soon as you can; social media is going to go crazy about this book.



GREY KNIGHTS: SONS OF TITAN

AUTHOR: DAVID ANNANDALE
PUBLISHER: THE BLACK LIBRARY
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 24TH

To the citizens of The Imperium of Mankind, the Grey Knights are a myth. The demon-killing Space Marines are only discussed in hushed whispers, as one can never be too sure. They are said to be silver-armoured heroes whose weapons blaze with holy fire. Of course, the legends are true. This collection of short stories by rising star David Annandale will feature noble space paladins fighting with the demonic avatars of corruption for the very fate of mankind.



STAR WARS: AFTERMATH

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG
PUBLISHER: CENTURY
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 10TH

Chuck Wendig is better known for his horror writing, specifically the swearword-fuelled Miriam Black series, so it's very interesting that he's been entrusted with one of the most important **Star Wars** novels so far. **Star Wars: Aftermath** bridges the events of **Return of the Jedi** with those of the upcoming movie, **The Force Awakens**. Wendig has been fairly tight-lipped as to what to expect, though as it apparently starts straight after the events of **Jedi**, we're hoping for at least a brief description of what happened to Endor once the Death Star blew up. Fingers crossed for some burning Ewoks.



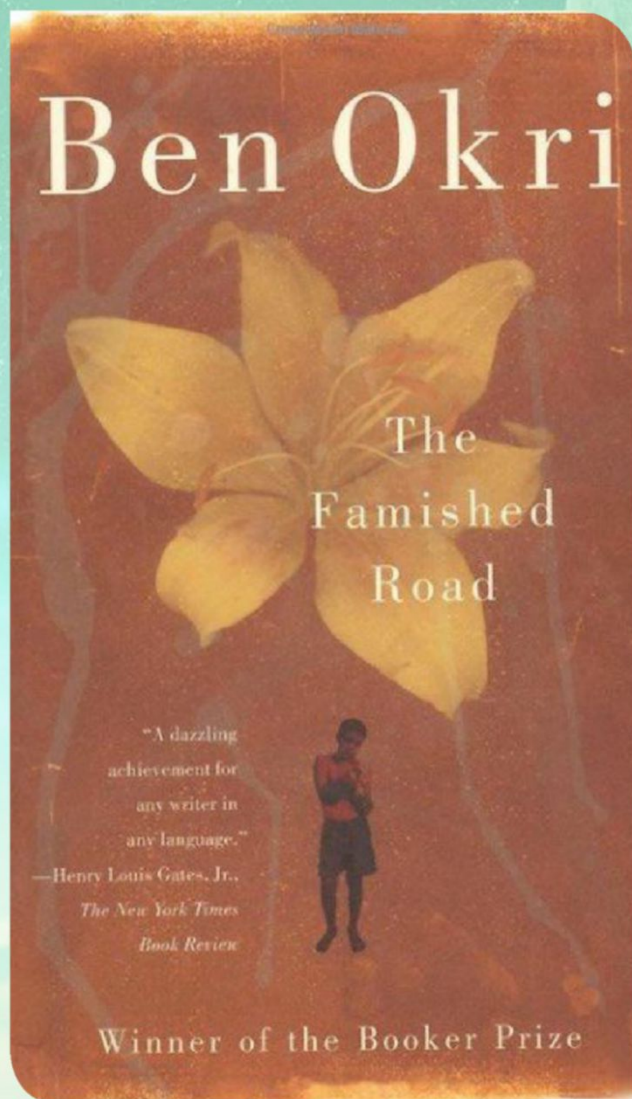
ARCHMAGE (HOMECOMING BOOK 1)

AUTHOR: R. A. SALVATORE
PUBLISHER: WIZARDS OF THE COAST
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

The Forgotten Realms have never quite been the same since R.A. Salvatore's Drizzt Do'urden. He is perhaps **Dungeons and Dragons'** most iconic figure: the Dark Elf who has turned from the path of darkness to become a great hero. Or something. Forgotten Realms fans will eat this up and rumours are this is a return to form for Salvatore. Do expect sinister magic-users, spiders, dark elves, random cruelty and ridiculous action scenes. Don't expect it to make any sense if you aren't into The Forgotten Realms franchise.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



If you're tired of sword and sorcery fantasy, then Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* is the perfect book for you.

Azaro is a spirit-child, born multiple times into earthly bodies but never completely severing his connection to the spirit world, as most children do. Spirit-children often die young. They are often happy to go. This time, however, Azaro changes his mind; he is tired of rebirth, and instead wants to experience his single human life in all its

triumphs and tragedies. But abandoning the spirit world isn't as easy as he thought, and Azaro finds himself not only fighting against the rampant poverty and violence of the ghetto, but the spirits that try to call him home.

Published in 1991, the magic of *The Famished Road* is not bright, sparkly, or loud, standing in stark contrast to a realistic setting. Instead, it's insidious; stalking Azaro through the ghetto to trick him, hurt him and scare

him into running from the people who love him. There is no artifice in this kind of fantasy, no disguise or pretty glamour, and the rawness of the magic Azaro encounters is perfectly suited to the world he inhabits. Azaro's district is set in an unnamed African country and the poverty is inescapable. It's in the filthy, unpaved streets and the absent hum of electricity; it's in the frequent hunger and the sound of rats scratching at the walls of Azaro's one-room home; and it's in the aching bones of his parents, their bodies aged long before their time. It's not pretty and it's not comfortable, but it's a landscape you don't often see in genre fiction which makes it incredibly valuable. The beauty of genre fiction is that it can touch everyone no matter their circumstance, and it's a shame that extreme poverty is often overlooked as a setting for miracles or magic or amazing things. Something Okri really tries to do in this novel is show not only that fantasy has a place in this setting, but that the people who live in poverty are capable of deeds just as wondrous as the ones that the spirits perform. Madame Koto flourishes throughout the novel, and eventually brings electricity to the neighbourhood. Azaro's father never loses his hope or his ambition. His mother displays almost otherworldly strength as she tries to keep her family alive. Everyone Azaro sees is magical in some way, and those observations are made all the more precious given what they have to work against.

Speaking of Azaro's observations, his narration is something I love about this book. The writing of *The Famished Road* is amazing, and as Okri is also a poet it's no surprise that he knows how to turn a phrase. Azaro is our only narrator, guiding readers through the novel in a

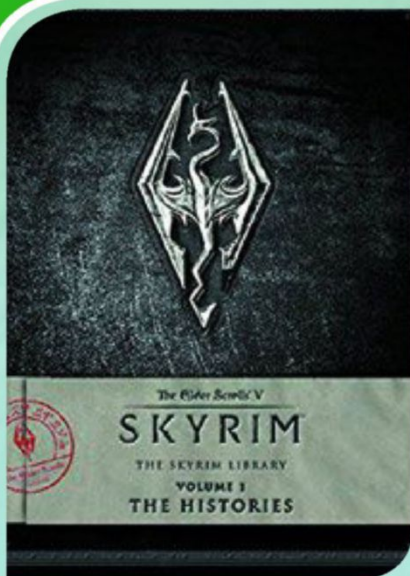
way that's both insightful and endearingly innocent. He is articulate and perceptive, which seems to me to reflect the experience he's had in his other lives. All of this eloquence is lost on Azaro's dialogue, which some might find jarring but I thought added a fantastic dimension to Azaro's character - his inner monologue is more mature than his mouth can manage. But be warned: Azaro's attention to detail does mean that you have to read this book carefully or risk losing track of what's going on.

If I had to find a single fault with this book, it's in its structure. *The Famished Road* is actually the first part of a trilogy, which includes 1993's *Songs of Enchantment* and 1998's *Infinite Riches*. *The Famished Road* is a wonderful setup to those two books, but as a standalone novel, I'm not entirely convinced it works. By the end of the book you do feel like you've arrived somewhere, but there are so many questions left unanswered - so many plots initiated that aren't completely fulfilled - that it doesn't feel like a complete journey. Perhaps it's because the plot moves slowly, and while so much changes in the ghetto, so much more stays stubbornly the same. Perhaps it's because Azaro is as half-formed as any other child. Whatever it is, while there is excellent work here, overall it wasn't as satisfying a read as I'd hoped.

Despite its faults, *The Famished Road* is an amazing book. It's poetic and poignant and thought-provoking, and unique in the landscape of fantasy fiction. Azaro's journey is both beautiful and unkind, and while it may not be an entirely relaxing read, it's one every human being should experience. Because really, who wants to always read in their comfort zone? +

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



THE SKYRIM LIBRARY, VOL. 1: THE HISTORIES

AUTHOR: BETHESDA SOFTWARE / PUBLISHER:
TITAN BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Few can build a world quite as immersive and detailed as Bethesda. From their contributions to the Fallout series to the many Elder Scrolls instalments, there is a

constant sense of wonder and creativity. However, while they might be truly beautiful, often criticisms surrounding the games list them as being shallow, lacking dimension or immersive lore to keep the world interesting. This first volume of The Skyrim Library proves just how wrong that assertion truly is.

Serving as an in-universe documentation, The Histories is a collected series of works by multiple authors. Offering a variety of differing extracts and authors, readers are given a general outlook at the world and its events. Starting with the Empire's brief history and the societal links across Tamriel, the authors elected to take a very broad view. The focus here was upon the events leading up to Elder Scrolls Online and Skyrim itself, fleshing out how the world developed. As such, while it might skip over points such as the arrival of humans and fall of the Ayleid, the book covers events such as the ill-fated invasion of Akavir. Chapters include stories familiar to fans such as The Argonian Account and a variety of travel journal extracts. It might not be as in-depth as other sources, but it ultimately offers a great starting point for many fans looking to expand their understanding of the lore.

Backing the varied stories and historical depictions are some truly

stunning pieces of artwork. These range from scratchy images of a tomb and mummified corpses to full illustrations of Azura's statue. Each compliments the various texts extraordinarily well and helps offer something even for fans who retain extensive knowledge of the timeline and lore. This said, however, it's with the artwork that you do begin to realise the book's greatest failing: It doesn't push the envelope. Much of what's found here is a recounting and listing of many known events, and it never manages to go into the more obscure or unseen areas of the world. There's no mention of the sea elves, the aspects of Oblivion, and tenures of certain leaders are woefully cut short. There is also very little reflection on the other games, with Morrowind only getting a brief mention and the artistic styles emulating only Skyrim's armour or species designs over any other game.

The first volume of The Skyrim Library is a fantastic start to a promising series, and offers a great deal to fans. It's a shame that it couldn't do more to reflect on the series as a whole. Buy it, but just bear in mind it's more focused upon recent releases than the whole series.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★☆☆ 8



ARMADA

AUTHOR: ERNEST CLINE / PUBLISHER:
CENTURY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ernest Cline's debut novel, Ready Player One, shot the author to stardom, and is now being turned into a Spielberg Hollywood blockbuster. Part of the book's appeal is that it's peppered with pop-culture references

and has a fast-paced, easy-to-get-into style. His second book, Armada, replicates this seemingly winning formula very closely.

The plot follows the misadventures of Zack Lightman, a troubled teenager who is very good at video games. His father, also a gaming geek, died in a sewage explosion when he was very young, and Zack has inherited his dad's full collection of '80s and '90s VHS tapes. He also owns his father's pile of rambling notes about a Government conspiracy involving games. When Zack starts seeing video game-style spaceships in the sky, he begins to worry for his own sanity.

Armada is not the tense thriller you may suspect it is from the first 40 pages or so. It quickly moves into action movie territory, which is slightly disappointing. It reads very much like an incredibly detailed movie pitch in places. The story structure follows the style of your typical popcorn-munching blockbuster, and it's punctuated with the sort of big action sequences that would translate well into a big budget CGI-fest. The novel's various heroes are also described in a way that would make them very easy to cast. It's a good job that they're easy to

visualise as apart from that they're pretty two-dimensional. If Armada ever gets turned into a movie, it will fail the Bechdel test.

Cline has also filled Armada with video game and movie references. Every major character is some sort of geek, and most of them are quite happy to talk in a language composed of pop culture slang and movie quotes. This lends an air of fun to the story, but it gets tired quite quickly. Cline also feels the need to constantly point out various plot holes in the story. This is both foreshadowing, and an attempt at maintaining the readers suspension of disbelief, but builds up reader expectations to an unmanageable level at times.

Armada is a solid sci-fi romp, written in a very relaxed style and is filled with lots of video game-style violence and crammed with pop-culture ideas and notes. If you're looking for the novel equivalent of bubblegum, then you'll lap this up. Otherwise, just wait for the inevitable movie to come out.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★☆☆ 6



THE EMPRESS GAME

AUTHOR: RHONDA MASON
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Kayla Reunimon harbours a deadly secret; she and her brother, Corinth, are the rightful

heirs of their planet Ordoch, a planet in Wyrd Space, and potentially the only survivors of a deadly military coup initiated by the Sakien Empire's International Diplomats Corps (IDC). In order to protect them both, they have escaped to a backwater planet where she gets by on the winnings from the Blood Pit, a fight-to-the-death tournament that pits woman against woman. Her cat-like stealth and ability to put on a show earns her the moniker Shadow Panthe, and it is this skill that Malkor, leader of an IDC octet, needs to ensure that his friend Princess Isonde wins the Empress Game.

Rather than being allowed to marry her lover Prince Aldrin, Isonde must undergo fighting in the Empress Game, an ancient ritual set up primarily for the pleasure of the (predominantly

male) rulers. The prize? As well as being allowed to marry her lover, Isonde would gain a seat on the Council of Seven - the sovereign body overseeing the Sakien Empire. The winner of the Empress Game has the power to influence political decision making as an ambassador and political player. If she can convince the crowds as a body double and win the seat for Princess Isonde, the promise of cessation of the military occupation of Kayla's home planet is assured. There are no guarantees that the fight will be easy for this gladiatrix; every eligible woman in the Empire desires membership of the Council of Seven.

Alongside the main narrative, the subplots that run throughout offer an opportunity for spinning future stories to explore - a

deadly, incurable disease carried by nanoparticles threatens to ravage the entire empire, other worlds and their exotic differences are introduced through some of the women who fight Kayla, there is an entire back story of the formation of the Council of Seven and how the IDC "civil servants" became corrupted (and who these antagonists are). There are many parallels to contemporary western society in this tale, which makes the novel all the more intriguing and the situation and characters sympathetic. Ending on a brilliant cliff-hanger, this fast-paced, feminist-tinged, intelligent book from Rhonda Mason is (hopefully) the opener to a brilliant science fiction epic.

JENNIE BAILEY



HALO: HUNTERS IN THE DARK

AUTHOR: PETER DAVID
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Halo as a universe has always been one of those success stories better buoyed up by its tie-in literature than main storyline. While the video games might have formed the skeleton, it was only through its novels that something of true substance began to emerge. Hunters in the Dark is the latest

book to add greater depth to the setting, and it's very much a return to form for the franchise.

Set two years following the UNSC-Covenant war, the novel follows a joint excavation between human and sangheili remnants as they attempt to uncover the relics of the Forerunners. As things quickly spiral out of control, threatening the tenuous peace, something far worse than anything they imagined awaits them in the halls of the dead...

Past books have focused almost exclusively upon humans combating the Covenant. As such, the point here of showing both sides in a tense uneasy truce for the first time is incredibly refreshing, as are its main characters. Both Luther Mann and Usze 'Taham are very atypical members of their kind, having escaped or overcome the distrust on both sides.

With one a scientist and the other a warrior, their thoughts prove to be just as interesting as the book's core mystery, especially surrounded by those embittered by the conflict. Peter David manages to rapidly establish an even focus, voice, and memorable characteristics without the story feeling rushed.

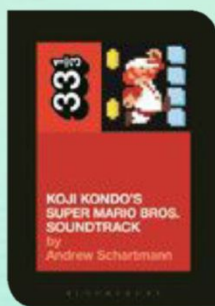
The crux of the action stems from situational pressure and the fractious nature of two former foes having to work together. As such, while it takes time for the bullets to start flying, though prior to that the tensions of dealing with Forerunner technology and a conspiracy within sangheili ranks is enough to get most readers hooked.

Unfortunately, the novel is often far too direct in presenting events. Much of its structure is one that would far benefit a comic or more visual medium. As such, beyond an excellent

introduction to Mann, there are many sections where it feels as if it has been written with visual panels in mind. As such, the book doesn't quite so organically develop as you might expect, and lacks some of the lengthier character elements which would have seriously benefitted the storytelling here. What's more is that the story has obviously been written for fans, and as such there's very little effort made to introduce the universe to new readers.

As Halo novels go, it's a decent outing with a few points of note. Fans who suffered through the misery of the Kilo-Five Trilogy would do well to give this one a try, and see the universe can still produce worthwhile tales.

CALLUM SHEPHARD



33 1/3 : KOJI KONDO'S SUPER MARIO BROS. SOUNDTRACK

AUTHOR: ANDREW SCHARTMANN
PUBLISHER: BLOOMSBURY
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

By the time this book displayed the twentieth example of a musical score (a 1-up sound effect), we realised we'd bitten off more than we could chew. The GIF showing Homer Simpson's brain leaving his head expressed our feelings perfectly.

Such was our first exposure to Bloomsbury Academic's 33 1/3 range, a series of short books devoted to the study of significant albums or, in this case, soundtracks.

While we weren't expecting a book in this highly academic series to be like Music for Dummies, sometimes it feels like Schartmann has forgotten

that a lot of his readers don't hold two music degrees. As this 106th volume of the series is their first gaming title, we feel there should have been quite a bit of dumbing down, as Super Mario Bros. is an extremely popular subject that's likely to bring in a lot of new readers.

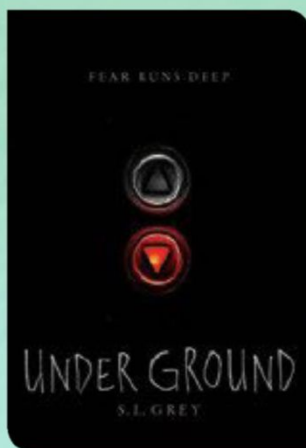
The bits we understood, however, were generally informative and entertaining. The first half of the book was dedicated to the historical context of the gaming industry in general and Koji Kondo specifically, as well as dealing with the technical limitations he had to work with when creating

his seminal soundtrack. This was easily the most fascinating part and we would've been happy if the book was written entirely in that style.

But it is what it is. We look forward to reading more gaming titles, but if they're as impenetrable to the casual reader as this one then you can count us out. If you are a music enthusiast or can tell a treble clef from a high C, you'll probably enjoy this book. Anyone else is advised to just read the first half.

SCOTT VARNHAM





UNDER GROUND

AUTHOR: S. L. GREY
PUBLISHER: PAN MACMILLAN
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Under Ground has been marketed as a 'high concept thriller' and has had comparisons drawn to Stephen King's *The Stand*. Although *Under Ground* may not be as epic as *The Stand*, it certainly lives up to the excitement that it is currently generating.

The main plot is based around The Sanctum, a self-sustaining survival facility for the rich. As is inevitable in every survival story, a super-virus breaks out, forcing the paranoid to lock themselves away within The Sanctum. At this point, it becomes clear where the story is heading. Personalities clash and secrets are slowly revealed as the situation becomes increasingly desperate.

The novel is told through a mix of third person and first person narrative, focusing on different characters by chapter. S.L. Grey has managed to make this work effectively by allowing the reader to see how some characters think, whilst hiding others thoughts by telling their story through a third person narrative. This works very effectively and distorts the reader into changing their thoughts about certain characters based on the point of view. Some are less developed than others, but that is a consequence of the way the story is told and does not necessarily have a negative influence on the overall enjoyment of the story. Some of the characters can

also be stereotypical, but when they are limited in their physical surroundings it's difficult to give them more of a personality. S. L. Grey has done a terrific job within the limitations the story has.

Under Ground is well paced and it certainly has the potential to become a classic thriller if it's able to get the exposure it deserves. It's full of well-developed characters, captivating twists and an unpredictable conclusion that will have any thriller fan guessing all the way through. A thoroughly enjoyable read from an up-and-coming author.

ANDREW MUSK

+++++ 8



HALF A WAR

AUTHOR: JOE ABERCROMBIE
PUBLISHER: HARPER VOYAGER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Joe Abercrombie's *Shattered Sea* series comes to its terribly interesting conclusion with the third and final book, *Half a War*. The book follows the formula of the previous two, following the life and motivations of a previously unseen younger character. At the same time, it expands on the consequences of the actions of previous main characters.

The world of the *Shattered Sea* is at war. The High King has had enough of the Viking-like Gettlanders and their barbarian allies, and thanks to the manipulations of the vengeance-driven Father Yarvi, peace is not an option. Alas, the High King has more resources and the Gettlanders are on the back foot. Worse still, the Princess Skara has lost her kingdom, which is a pity as her homeland

also happened to be the most tactically valuable piece of land in the war.

The two new heroes are the Princess Skara and her reluctant bodyguard, Raith. In a theme common to the series, both have their own coming of age stories with plenty of angst. We don't get quite as much time with these characters as they deserve; there's also a war story to tell and the characters from the previous books still have their own tales to tell.

Elements of *Half a War* feel rushed; though key events (such as a journey to the Elf Ruins) have long been foreshadowed, because there is little build up in this book it feels as if the story is incomplete. More so than the others, *Half a War* is very much part of a series; it won't make sense as a standalone,

and the (extremely) satisfying conclusions to multiple story arcs need the novel-length run-ups they've had to work.

For a war story, there is less grime and horror here; Joe Abercrombie does not quite live up to his title as Lord GrimDark. *War* becomes abstract at points, and though the author touches on the reasons why violence should never be taken lightly (or made easy), this doesn't carry the weight it needs to in order to replace the gore and despair of the previous books. *Half a War* is a strong conclusion to an outstanding series. We look forward to seeing what Abercrombie does next.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



THE DEAD HOUSE

AUTHOR: DAWN KURTAGICH
PUBLISHER: ORION
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 6TH

Piecemeal storytelling is the found footage of the literary world. The idea of assembling a story from journal entries, first-person accounts, and medical reports is nothing new, but much like its movie equivalent, it only works when done well and it tends to lend itself to horror. *The Dead House* is a clever attempt at doing something new with this very familiar format but doesn't quite make the grade.

The plot is a fairly convoluted one. Our main protagonist is Carly Johnson; a teenaged girl who has been diagnosed with psychological issues following the death of her parents. Carly is a shy, well behaved and studious lady. Kaitlyn Johnson is her rebellious sister who curses,

swears and picks fights. The twist is that they share the same body, with Kaitlyn only coming out at night and Carly having the day. The reason why may be supernatural, or it may not.

The bulk of the story is told through Kaitlyn's diary, and as the tale progresses, we learn more about Kaitlyn's dark nature. Various excerpts and reports littered throughout the book refer to a thing called 'The Johnson Incident', a tragic event that led investigators to look for Kaitlyn's diary in the first place.

The main problem is that the third-party storytelling style makes it hard to actually engage with the main protagonists. Add to this the fact both the plot and the

storytelling method has been done many times before, and the result is a messy and rather boring journey. It is very tightly written and Kurtagich clearly has a firm handle on her world and its characters. It's simply that the story fails to grip the reader, despite multiple attempts to draw you in.

If the plot and style of *The Dead House* sounds original and innovative to you, then you'll probably have a lot of fun with the book. It's well written and aimed at the inexperienced reader. If you've heard it all before, however, be aware that there is nothing new for you here.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 6



INTERVIEW - JOE ABERCROMBIE

Best known for *THE FIRST LAW* trilogy, JOE ABERCROMBIE published *HALF A KING* in 2014, the first book in his new *SHATTERED SEA* series, which won the 2015 Locus Award for best Young Adult book. We caught up with him to find out more about the last book in this series, *HALF A WAR*...

STARBURST: Tell us about your latest novel, *Half a War*...

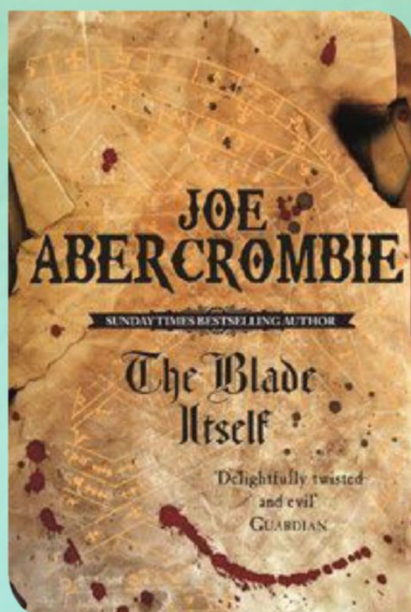
Joe Abercrombie: Well, war is a theme, as you might imagine! The shattered sea is ruled by a High King and more specifically, by his ruthless minister Grandmother Wexen, and she has pushed and maneuvered various nations around the sea so that they have no choice but to go to war. Gettland and their ally and once rival Vansterland are threatened by a wide confederation of the High King and his allies. So, Father Yarvi brings some allies together in an attempt to succeed against almost impossible odds.

Why the multiple points of view throughout the series?

I like that breadth, and I like having different points of view and threads to follow in a fantasy book. The idea with these books was to be quite tight in the focus; to be quite short and fast. To have the pace of a thriller, if you like. To try to do epic fantasy with a driving, forward pace; by splitting each book into many different threads and characters. I thought it would be interesting to start from one character's point of view only then to bring in two different characters in the second book. *Half a War* has three inter-related plot lines, although the characters in the previous books are very much there in the background. It also gave me the opportunity to move time forward between each book but to keep the protagonist in that age range of sixteen to eighteen that I was aiming for. I think changing the characters just gives a different tone and flavour to each book, keeping it all interesting and varied. It also allows us to see the characters we knew very well in previous books from the outside.

Did you have each character's story arcs plotted out in advance?

Up to a point. Certainly Yarvi is the central character of the first book and then he's more in the background in the other two, but the arc of the three together is very much a story about him. That arc was very much set from the start, and I had a good idea where that was going. With the other individual characters that were then introduced during the books, I didn't have a precise idea at the start of the series where they would all end up, but I had a rough idea what the overall back story would be. They fitted in to that bigger story. I tend to have a rough idea what the book will be and then I will plan each book as I come to start writing it. As I go through the book, I'll get a better and better idea of where I'm going. It's really in the revision. Once I've finished the first draft of a book, I really strip it down so I can do a focused plot and get a good idea of what the characters will be. It's good to have a guiding direction and a plan. If you start with no plan you can easily wander off into nowhere and it's hard to find your way back.

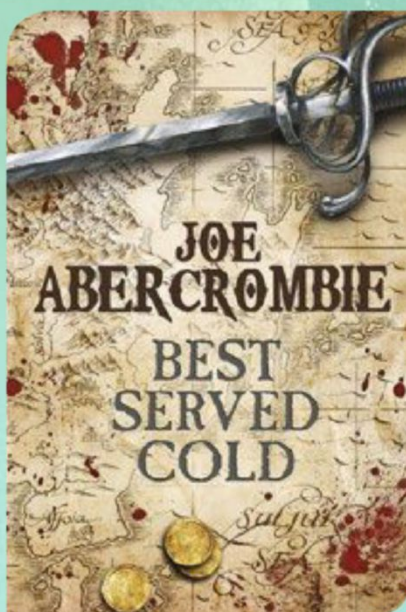


The Shattered Sea series is aimed at Young Adults. Why?

This series developed out a conversation I had with Nick Lake, who is an editor of Young Adult books at Harper Collins. He liked my adult stuff and wanted me to write some YA books. That idea hung around for a while, and it took me a few years to have the time and an idea that would work. I think when writing for younger readers, I wasn't trying to get into a particular category as such, I was just trying to write the sort of book that I would have liked and read at age 14 to 16. I wanted it to have the same edge and moral ambiguity as the books I write for adults. I wanted it to be challenging and not talk down to the audience at all. At the same time, I'd written very bloody and nasty scenes in my adult work. I didn't want to repeat that style. I wanted it to be distinct and different.

What's next for you?

Good question. There's always something,



isn't there? When *Half a War* comes out, I'll be touring and doing a lot of events. I've got a collection of short stories in *The First Law* world that will probably come out sometime next year. It's looking like it's going to be more adult books in *The First Law* world. I've got a trilogy that I owe to Gollancz, so at some point I need to get started with that. I've already some idea as to what it is, but it's pretty vague at the moment. There's a few other irons lurking in the fire that might end up taking up some time, as they always do.

Do you think your stories would work in other media? As a TV show perhaps?

Would I like to see them turned into a television series with the depth and success of *Game of Thrones*? Yeah, I think that's not a tough one to say yes to. Obviously, it would give a huge boost to the books as well and that can be no bad thing. Of course, things aren't always adapted well and you can't really control what happens

when you set these things in motion. You can try and sell the rights to the right person and hope the right people get involved and that they respect the books. But it's an ensemble effort in a way that writing a book never is. You'll never have that control, so you just have to roll the dice and trust to luck. I'd welcome anything that made me stratospherically successful and enabled me to have a toilet seat carved from a single massive diamond.

You're known as Lord Grimdark. How did that come about?

The grimdark thing is something that happened to me long after the fact. I've heard it used four or five years ago to describe something that was absurdly pessimistic and almost laughable. Then people started using it to describe things like *Game of Thrones*. It's become a much more general descriptor. I never really set out to be one thing or another, I just set out to write the things I wanted to write. Because I'd read a lot of shiny and optimistic fantasy I wanted to do something different. I felt a lack of grit and darkness in it. So I ended up writing something quite cynical and gritty. It was an interesting contrast to what I'd read. I think grimdark has become more popular and has lost some of its impact.

You'd hate to become predictable for doing one sort of thing. It's important to try different things and keep people guessing!

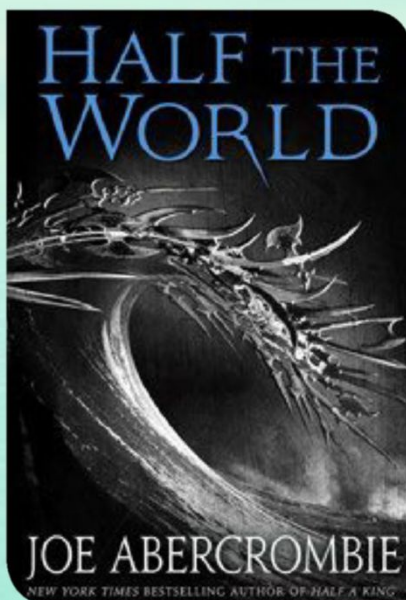
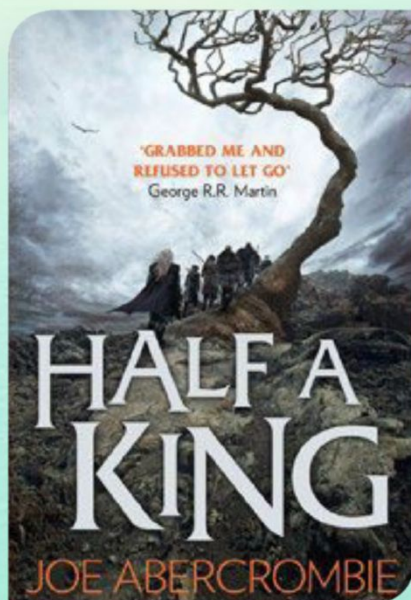
WORDS: ED FORTUNE

HALF A WAR is out now and is reviewed on page 99. You can find out more about the author at:

www.joeabercrombie.com.

COMPETITION

Win a set of limited edition prints, featuring quotes from Joe's *SHATTERED SEA* series. Visit STARBURSTMAGAZINE.COM/FEATURES/COMPETITIONS for details. We also have five signed hardbacks for the runners up!



STARBURST

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM
THE WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS



having problems and trying to deal with things." Sure sounds like Spidey to me.

I teased, last month, the possibility of a new Hulk. Nothing concrete just yet, but Marvel have released a teaser image of the Hulk, rumoured to be Amadeus Cho (when not green and angry, anyway). Not Ultimate Reed Richards, then, as I speculated last time. He'll debut in *The Totally Awesome Hulk*, written by Greg Pak and illustrated by Frank Cho. Amadeus Cho, for the uninitiated, being a former sidekick of Hulk's, and occasional friend to the super-group The Champions. He has also been described by Reed Richards as the seventh most intelligent person in the world, so he's no slouch in the brains department either. 'Who is the Hulk?' teases Marvel. Well, as he was last seen presumed dead in a gamma bomb blast, Amadeus Cho is as good a bet as any. Also, it's really fun typing the name Amadeus. Amadeus, Amadeus!

Doctor Strange is next in line for a reinvention, with the Sorcerer Supreme set to get his own book from Jason Aaron and artist Chris Bachalo. What changes do Marvel have in store for the mystic magician? Well, he carries an axe now, and is apparently going to be pretty handy in a fight, if the announcement is anything to go by. This is good timing, with the character soon to get his own movie, starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Stephen Strange. Again, that's a pretty fun name to type, although I have yet to be convinced as to whether I really want a Benedict Cumberbatch Doctor Strange.

Anyway, to the DC Universe, where another (much less permanent) change to



Well, we've passed another halfway point in another year, and, as it tends to do, the world trundles inevitably onwards, things *happening* all the time. Events! News! Stories! These things aren't limited just to real life, and here at **The Watchtower**, I've spent the preceding weeks keeping track of those events, stories and news for you. So far we've had the continuing 'end' of the Marvel and DC Universes as we know them (see previous issues, readers!), the world's therein being in a constant state of flux as we speak.

Nothing makes that point quite like the heroes of the (all-new, all-different) Marvel Universe, where few things and people are as we remember them; Thor is now Jane Foster (I had suggested that the MCU might follow suit with a female Thor, when Hemsworth gets bored of the hammer – but good luck getting Natalie Portman to sign up for that), Sam Wilson is Captain America, and Steve Rogers is an old man. As many had speculated, Ultimate Spider-Man will be joining the Marvel Universe proper

(sources say that they'll be moving away from the whole 616 thing), although Peter Parker will also be staying on, albeit in a slightly different role than one might expect. Parker has finally been allowed to 'grow up', becoming a company owner (that'll be Parker Industries) and entrepreneur/inventor on the same level as Tony Stark. "He's operating with Parker Industries in not just New York, but also Shanghai and San Francisco and London," said writer Dan Slott. "He's going to be a far more global Spider-Man, and with that is going to come all new global threats. Things that will really test Spider-Man like never before".

New outlook, new suit. Parker gets a new suit out of it all, designed by comic legend Alex Ross. It's a more traditional Spider-Man look than some of his previous outfits (the less said about that monstrosity he borrowed from Stark, the better) and comes loaded with plenty of nifty gadgets and, um, a Spider-Mobile.

Where does that leave Miles? "You're going to get classic Spider-Man," Slott promises "a teenager in high school



the status quo there sees Commissioner Jim Gordon donning the Batsuit following Batman's presumed death (yeah right) during his latest battle with the Joker. We all know it won't stick, but in *Batman/Superman #22*, we'll see how he gets along with Superman, with the Man of Steel undergoing a personality change himself, at the hands of Gene Luen Yang and John Romita Jr. and their *Truth* storyline (which will feed into the aforementioned *Batman/Superman*). Now vulnerable after the use of his (still mildly stupid) power, we'll get a 'roguish', 'edgier' Superman, his secret identity revealed to the world by top reporter Lois Lane. How did she find out? Giveaway blood stains of course, after she notices Clark and Superman bleeding from the same place. "Tell me," a certain Batfleck has asked recently, "do you bleed?" Well, that answered that one, at least.

A reinvention from two years ago, this: outside of the Big Two, videogame fans can rejoice at the fact that Lara Croft, Tomb



Raider will be getting some more comic book action in *The Frozen Omen*. Since 2013's *Tomb Raider* videogame reboot, it's been something of a career renaissance for Lara, with Dark Horse publishing stories from Gail Simone and Rhianna Pratchett set within that continuity. This new miniseries will be written by Corinna Bechko and illustrated by Randy Green. We'll see her battling death cults, raiding tombs and, presumably, holding two pistols at the same time.

And now... the last crossover you ever expected. Or so the PR bumpf say, anyway. Writer of *The Private Eye*, *The Last Man* and *Runaways*, Brian K. Vaughan, is to get his own *Walking Dead* story, following his decision to let Image run with a print edition of his formerly online-only *The Private Eye*. Details are scant (save for the teaser image, which - don't hold your breath - suggests his *Private Eye* character will be turning up in the *Walking Dead* world), but Robert Kirkman has confirmed



that Vaughan's story will be set in the same continuity as that of Rick Grimes and chums. Hey, it can't be any worse than *Fear the Walking Dead* looks.

And that wraps up yet another edition of *View from the Watchtower*, a blissfully Archie-free instalment that's been all about change and evolution. Well, it's always helpful when the month's comic book news fits a theme. Join us again next month, though I dread to think what might have happened in the intervening weeks. By then, Jonah Jameson will probably be Spider-Man, for all I know. In that time, feel free to hit me up on Twitter or e-mail, which, no matter what happens elsewhere, remain very much the same.

(Amadeus, Amadeus!)

Sorry, couldn't help myself. Just had to get another one in there... ✦

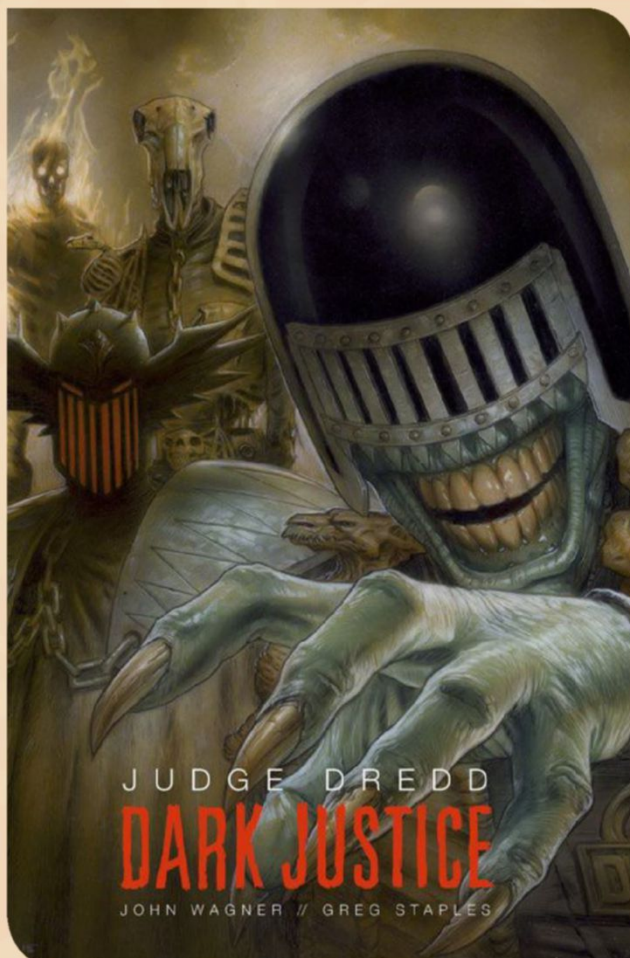
Joel Harley can be contacted at:
joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com
 and tweeted @joelharley

THE LAST CROSSOVER YOU EVER EXPECTED



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



JUDGE DREDD: DARK JUSTICE

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTIST: GREG STAPLES / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD
GRAPHIC NOVELS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

During their far too-long leave of absence (brief sojourn to the inside of a wine bottle in Day of Chaos aside), it's been a while since Judge Death and his Dark Judges graced the pages of 2000 AD. That changes for Dark Justice, in which John Wagner resurrects his popular supervillains to set the fearsome foursome on a gruesome vengeance trip against Dredd and Psi-Judge Anderson... this time, in deep space. Although maybe 'resurrects' is a poor choice of words. You cannot kill that which does not live, after all.

Hopes were high for Dark Justice, with Wagner overcoming his famous reticence at writing another Dark Judges story, promising a return to the characters' scarier roots (fair point: Judge Death as a time-travelling old lady did no-one any favours). With the wonderful Greg Staples on art duties, it should have been must-read Dredd, for new, faithful and lapsed readers alike. And, in terms of art and action, it certainly doesn't disappoint: Dark Justice might just be the best looking mainstream superhero comic book (both terms used lightly) you'll read all year.

Lushly hand-drawn and painted, and looking impressively



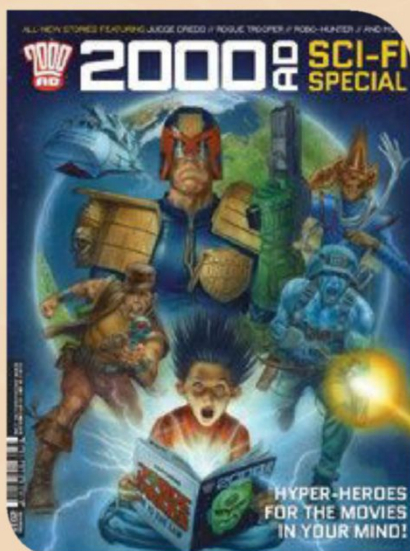
cinematic (modelled in real life by the Judge Minty team for Staples), it's the next best thing you'll get to a live-action Dredd vs. Death movie. There are places (mostly around Anderson's face) where it approaches photorealism, and that extends to the violence and action too. Not since Brian Bolland's original stories have Death and his cronies looked so good – from Fear's Game of Thrones-esque fur cape to the burning hot Judge Fire (who must have been a pain in the arse for Staples to draw and paint), the attention to detail is perfect. Dredd and Anderson's encounters with the creatures are even better – most notably a headbutt from Dredd to Death that would have made the Mean Machine himself proud.

Alas, it's on the story front where Dark Justice falls short. Wagner speaks in the foreword of his boredom with the Dark Judges – of wanting to avoid yet another tale in which the monsters wreak havoc for a while before being incapacitated and captured by Dredd. Unfortunately, while it might all unfold in outer space, that's still the case here. We're teased with appearances from the Sisters of Death and PJ Maybe, but these all come to naught – what we have instead is a simple tale (inspired quite a bit by Aliens) of vengeance and violence. Even the setting isn't that original – an isolated, lawless capsule, full of citizens escaping the oppression of Mega-City One – entirely reminiscent of the pleasure dome of Batman/Judge Dredd: Die Laughing (which Wagner had a hand in co-writing, so should have remembered). The writing, too, is slightly disappointing. While Dredd, Anderson and the cannon-fodder supporting cast are fine, Death and the Dark Judges seem to have very little to say, spouting the same old lines we've heard them do so many times before.

Dark Justice is too fun and too good to look at to be considered a failure – not by a long shot – but it does feel as though it could have been so much more. In spite of some fantastic action and the hilarious use of a woodchipper, it makes for lively but inconsequential reading. The game remains resolutely unchanged by the events depicted here, but, oh, what a game it is.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★☆☆ 7



2000 AD SCI-FI SPECIAL 2015

WRITER: VARIOUS / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER:
REBELLION / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For British comic readers in the 1980s, no summer was complete without the 2000 AD Sci-Fi Special. A collection of one-off stories featuring the most popular characters of the time, it went hand in hand with ice cream, sunny days and disappointment at Wimbledon. Publishers Rebellion revived the format last year, using it to showcase new talent as well as create a fresh wave of nostalgia. It worked very well, on both counts. This year's offering doesn't so much highlight the up-and-

coming writers and artists, rather it shows what 2000 AD has to offer in both creativity and attitude, all packaged within a beautiful cover by Greg Staples.

The Sci-Fi Special opens with a Judge Dredd story that has a sting in the tale and art that, while with a style of its own, is reminiscent of times gone by. Witty dialogue and slogans in the background are sure to raise a smile, with Dredd himself delivering a perfect punchline. The Robo Hunter story that follows is in the same vein; playful and packed with puns, it keeps that satirical edge that made Sam Slade's return last year such a breath of fresh air.

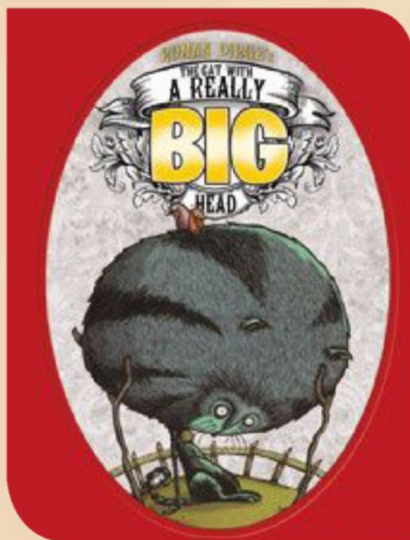
A Future Shock comes next, a three-page tale with an ending that doesn't come as much of a surprise. This sort of thing feels like it's been done many times before, yet it'll make the reader go back to the beginning to search for clues; looking at artwork by John Higgins is never a chore, but a second reading will also show the intelligence of the writing, something that may be missed on a first pass.

Next up, the return of Ace Trucking Co. Love them or loathe them, Ace Garp and his crew are an inescapable part of the comic's past; both writer and artist do well here, providing something that has a visible charm and a sly wit. Much the same can be said of Survival Geeks, another story that isn't to everyone's taste, despite the crisp and refreshing artwork. It's a single episode that unashamedly sets up the next story arc, yet stands alone nicely; it wears its heart on its sleeve, with even the characters themselves acknowledging the inspirations behind the story. In Rogue Trooper, 2000 AD have saved the best for last. Magnificent artwork and a

clever, poignant script combine to create something that is truly special. Like the Future Shock, its use of colour brings the story to vivid life; Nu Earth really does look like a chemical wasteland, one certainly not worth fighting over.

Overall, the Sci-fi Special is a resounding success, a collection of stories that are all of a high standard, hopefully cementing the potential for similar releases every year. While it may not be the ideal introduction for new readers, it's a magazine that will leave 2000 AD fans satisfied, yet hungry for more.

ALISTER DAVISON



THE CAT WITH A REALLY BIG HEAD

WRITER & ARTIST: ROMAN DIRGE / PUBLISHER:
TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Two of Roman Dirge's early works see a reprinting in an attractive, if slender, hardback volume from Titan Comics. The Cat with a Really Big Head was first published in 2002,

while The Monsters in My Tummy first saw light back in 1999, but neither have lost their impact or originality, despite the multitude of imitators that followed.

In his introduction, Roman acknowledges his inspirations for both stories, the former based on the Elephant Man while the latter was a bitter reaction to a breakup. It shows; right from the start, Dirge has his heart on his sleeve, yet he manages to be wickedly funny as he personifies a range of emotions into grotesque forms, battling it out for control of the body. These creatures, however odd, are drawn in such an expressive fashion that it's hard not to empathise with them. New colouring from Adam Bolton brings these beings to extra life, ensuring that each is given its own distinctive personality; they're monsters for sure, yet they are somehow endearing.

The book opens with its titular tale, words and pictures combining to create a story that is laugh-out-loud hilarious. It's also somewhat moving, prompting a few sympathetic clucks along with the guffaws. There's some biting satire in here too, as there is in Monsters, highlighting the shallow nature of our world; food for thought going hand in hand with the entertainment. There's also a wonderful twist that pulls the rug out from under the readers feet, while also tugging on the

heartstrings. Sandwiched between these two is the short piece A Big Question which, while not of the high standard of the other two, is sure to raise a smile.

Roman Dirge may be best known for Lenore, but The Cat with a Really Big Head is well worth seeking out, sure to be loved by his fans, anyone who has a taste for the bizarre or fancies a macabre version of Dr. Seuss. It's a glorious off-the-wall example of how raw emotion can be tempered into art, made into something that is quirky, fun, and hugely entertaining despite – or perhaps because of – its darkness. Weird, certainly, but also quite wonderful.

ALISTER DAVISON





**FOUR EYES VOLUME 1:
FORGED IN FLAMES
(REMASTERED)**

WRITER: JOE KELLY / ARTIST: MAX FIUMARA /
PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS / RELEASE DATE:
JULY 23RD

There are many ways to make it obvious to the reader that the world in which the characters exist is not our own, even in stories that are based (to an extent) in history. *Four Eyes: Forged in Flames* is a graphic novel set in New York during the Great Depression. Except that there is one major difference. Dragons are very, very real.

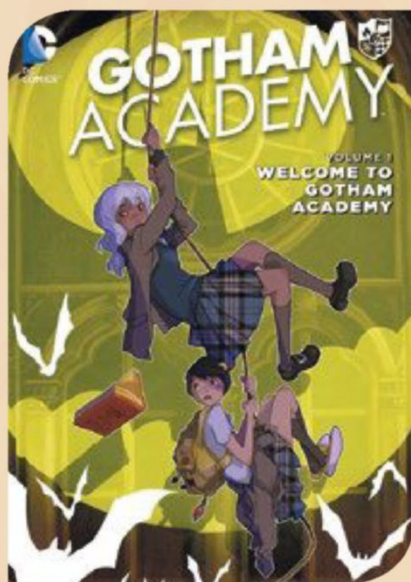
It follows the story of a young boy called Enrico. Despite no one having any money or work, Enrico's father is somehow able to put food on the table and look after his wife and boy. Unfortunately, that's because the man is going into dragon lairs to abduct infant dragons. Predictably, Enrico finds himself the only man in the household. He's a tough lad and will do anything to make ends meet. Even following in his father's footsteps.

Fire-breathing, treasure-hungry monsters make for such a perfect metaphor for the Depression it seems obvious when you see it. Joe Kelly's pacing and dialogue is spot on all the way along. Kelly is better known for the staggeringly good *I KILL GIANTS*, and his talent shines through with this book. It is gripping and clever, and despite Enrico not being the most likeable of heroes, you can almost feel the child's desperation. Max Fiumara's art is appropriately dark and moody, capturing both the despair of the period and the terror of the dragons.

The original *Four Eyes* comic books came out in 2008, with all editions long out of print. Image have breathed new life into

the project with this new trade paperback, and the ongoing series will be relaunched later this year. Given the long wait we've had so far, let's hope that volume two is worth holding out for. It has a lot to live up to, as volume one is very good indeed.

ED FORTUNE



**GOTHAM ACADEMY
VOLUME 1**

WRITERS: BECKY CLOONAN, BRENDEN FLETCHER
/ ARTIST: KARL KERSCHL, MINGJUE HELEN CHEN /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Gotham has its very own spooky prep school, obviously full of strange, curious students and teachers alike. Artist Becky Cloonan wields the pen (or keyboard) for this new adventurous series alongside writer Brenden Fletcher, and they put a whole new

perspective on the tales and characters within Gotham. It's dark and eerie but the innocence of teen angst gives the world a refreshingly lighter tone. The youthful nature of this series is very much enhanced by artist Karl Kersch, who creates some beautiful expressions in the characters, bringing each one to life with a manga-like style.

The adventure begins when aloof protagonist Olive Silverlock returns to the academy after a mysterious incident which kept her away all summer. She comes back feeling isolated, with whispers behind her back. She can't even bear to speak to her boyfriend, Kyle, or is it ex-boyfriend now? Olive is confused and trying to discover who she is. Her one friend is Mia (aka Maps), a freshman and Kyle's younger sister, who follows Olive everywhere. Maps brings all the fun and giggles to this series with her gleeful optimism; carrying a compass and torch wherever she goes ready for the next escapade, using her self-taught skills from playing D&D-inspired role playing game *Serpents and Spells*.

Gotham Academy has a very Hogwarts feel to it, an extensive and prestigious boarding school with a profoundly ominous atmosphere; the North Wing hall has been blocked from passage with rumours that it's haunted. It's filled with kooky professors and an extremely powerful headmaster. Although there is no real connection to magic or the supernatural, it most definitely has that mystical ambience. As Olive tries to figure her own life out, she is soon drawn to the enigmas of Gotham Academy. Thereafter,

she finds herself in threatening predicaments but friendships unfold when she bands together with a motley crew of teens who also seek adventure and answers.

It's easy to get carried away in the melodrama and character plots; it's fun and keeps you drawn in with all its mystery. There is a shadow of Batman that lurks over the academy, much to the dislike of Olive, who for some mysterious reason has a lot of hatred for the Dark Knight. Although he does make an appearance, he is very much in the background, and there are references to other Batman characters throughout the series. If you are tired of the grittier, sinister mood which encompasses most of the current Batman comics, *Gotham Academy* is great for those looking for a new angle with compelling female protagonists.

SAMANTHA WARD

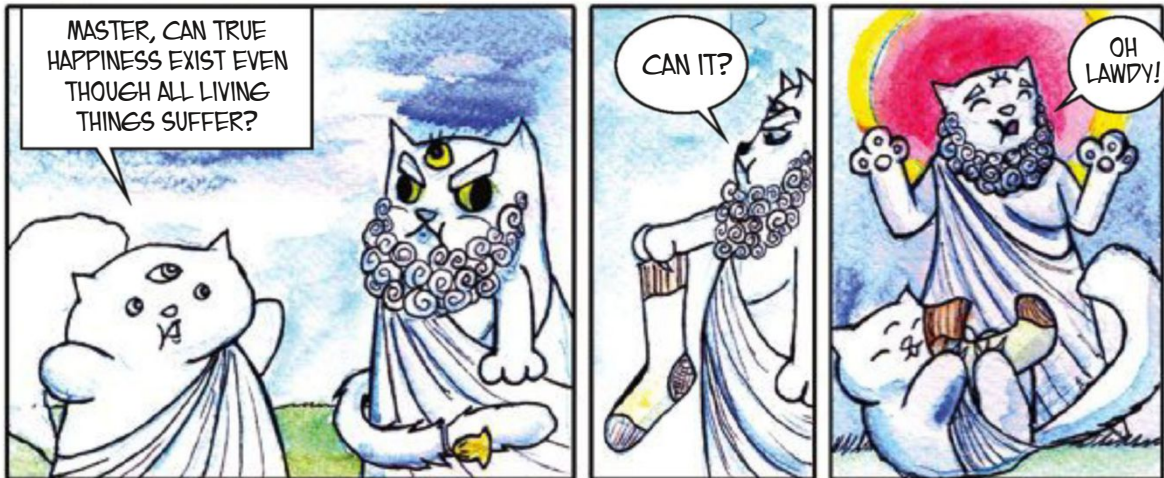


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THE TEACHINGS OF SO CAT ES







ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND
UP FROM THE
WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA WITH
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



James Wan Confirmed As ROBOTECH Director

Furious 7 director James Wan is one of Hollywood's biggest and busiest, and he's recently confirmed that he'll be helming Sony's feature adaption of **Robotech**. Based on Harmony Gold's localisations of the Tatsunoko-produced anime **The Super Dimension Fortress Macross**, **Super Dimension Cavalry Southern Cross** and **Genesis Climber MOSPEADA**. Gianni Nunnari and Mark Canton are producing, with **G.I. Joe**'s Michael Gordon penning the script.

New SPEED RACER Series in the Works

Following the critical panning of the Wachowskis' live action do-over of the sixties racing manga **Mach GoGoGo**, **Speed Racer** was probably the last franchise expected to make a comeback. But Tatsunoko Productions is currently developing the series with a modern audience in mind, following a petty lawsuit over rights issues. Details are sparse, but it's a welcome return for the classic series.

MEGA MAN Turning 30 with a New Animated Series

On the subject of classics making comebacks, **Mega Man** gets a look in with an upcoming series to coincide with the Blue Bomber's 30th anniversary. Development is spearheaded by a tag team of Man of Action Entertainment (of **Ben Ten** fame) and Dentsu Entertainment USA. The 26-episode run marks another western foray into anime territory, and is currently slated for 2017.

China Blacklists Anime

In a regressive move, mirroring England's own fraught history with video nasties, China has banned 38 anime series. Acting on what it felt was protecting 'the healthy development of youth', The Chinese Ministry of Culture has blacklisted shows, including **Attack on Titan** and **Death Note**, from appearing online. Multiple websites have been cautioned, with fines for carrying the shows, with others closed entirely. This comes amidst the country's crackdown on Internet content.

AKIRA Adaptation Snags DAREDEVIL Showrunner

The long gestating Warner Bros adaption of seminal anime **Akira** has finally gained some steam after bagging **Sons of Anarchy** scribe Marco J. Ramirez to pen the script. Ramirez, who'll also be acting as showrunner for **Daredevil** Season 2, may just be the bright spark to bring the live action remake to fruition.

Kazuya Tatekabe 1934-2015

Veteran voice actor Kazuya Tatekabe has died aged 80, following acute respiratory failure, sparking an outpouring of adoration from fans and industry pundits alike. Tatekabe was famed for lending his tones to bully characters, most notably for Warusa in **Time Bokan**, Tonzura in **Yatterman** and Takeshi 'Gian' Gouda in **Doraemon**. Our thoughts are with his family.

Publisher to Resurrect THE FAMILIAR OF ZERO

Despite the death of author Noboru Yamaguchi, publisher MF Bunko J has announced plans to continue **The Familiar of Zero**. Yamaguchi, who wrote and published 20 of a planned 22 fantasy light novels, passed away aged 41 in 2013.

ASSASSINATION CLASSROOM Eyes Return

Though the first series of **Assassination Classroom** has finished its run, studio Lerche has thanked fans for watching over the last six months, and assured all that a new series is slated for 2016. The anime adaption of Yūsei Matsui's hit **Shonen Jump** manga has proved to be a snowball success, sparking a multimedia franchise.

BEYBLADE Spinning Back on Screens

In another unexpected return, a new **Beyblade** anime series is in the works, based on the latest incarnation of Takara Tomy's spinning tops. The new toy line, **Beyblade Burst**, is set for a late July release in Japan, with the companion manga to follow in August. The series, being the eighth animated adaption, is slated for a spring 2016 release.

ONE PIECE Sets Record

Eiichiro Oda's **One Piece** manga has set a Guinness world record for number of copies published by a single author, surprising no-one. As of December 2014, the sprawling series sold a whopping 320,866,000 copies worldwide. The series is currently on its 78th volume and counting.



THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



**KILL LA KILL :
COLLECTOR'S EDITION PART 3 OF 3**
DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HIROYUKI IMAISHI / SCREENPLAY: KAZUKI
NAKASHIMA / STARRING: AMI KOSHIMIZU, RYOKA YUZUKI, ROMI PARK,
YUKARI TAMURA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

From studio Trigger, who brought you the equally bombastic and visually enthralling Gurren Lagann, is the explosive shounen satire Kill la Kill. Its distinctive art style is simultaneously throwback and novel in a series that's the animated equivalent of ADHD. Put simply, Kazuki Nakashima's brainchild centres on vagabond high schooler Ryuko Matoi searching for her dad's killer. Armed with her

scissor blade, she comes to Honnouji Academy where the students, led by the dictator-like Satsuki Kiryuin, wear Goku uniforms which grant them abilities and strength.

The third and final entry in the collector's Blu-ray editions may only contain the last five episodes (plus the OVA), but fortunately it's the best part of the series. The climactic collection is packed with

familial revelations in the violent melodrama of Ryuko's life. Over the course of her vengeance quest, Ryuko wins the viewer over with aplomb as the figurehead of a motley crew of characters as ridiculous as they are loveable.

Although the series winds up the overblown tropes of shounen (the convoluted action and transformation sequences in particular), it has its pervy cake and eats it. Sure, it frames the outrageous outfits and unflattering transformations as satire, but they're still there and present like the harem show relishing echhi it purports to lampoon. It'll put off plenty of viewers but, taken with a pinch of salt, it's pretty hilarious just how excessive the creative team take it.

Despite that, Kill la Kill is deceptively clever, offering a skewering look at the darker side of the fashion industry and, if you can look past the gratuitous fan service, body image. It's inflected with themes of homogenisation and identity, alongside the usual suspects of friendship and perseverance, but you'd be fool to take it

completely seriously.

At this stage in the series, Kill la Kill has shed a lot of its goofy skin and sticks to its convictions, morphing into something altogether darker and more unhinged, an apocalyptic and psychedelic tale that doesn't scrimp on light relief or the imaginatively concealed nudity. It'll set you back a small fortune, but with the best of the series to hand, plus the OVA and art booklet, you'd be hard pressed not to snaffle it up.

Extras: Kill la Kill Digest Naked Memories by Aikuro Mikisugi / Clean opening / Clean closing / OVA Episode 25 / Booklet

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★★★ 9



BLEACH SERIES 15 - PART 2
DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NORIYUKI ABE / SCREENPLAY: MASASHI SOGO
/ STARRING: JOHNNY YONG BOSCH, STEPHANIE SHEH, DEREK STEPHEN
PRINCE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Bleach Series 15 Part 2 gathers together episodes 330 to 342 for the climax of the Gotei 13 Invading Army arc, and while a marked improvement over the first half, there's still so much padding, packed with flashbacks

and reams of exposition. This is shounen, after all.

For all its faults, Bleach is still a strikingly cool show with great characters and a soundtrack almost second to none, but the plot is really

dragging its knuckles. The latest addition to the gang, the green haired, testy Nozomi, realises the full extent of her power and her fighting style is a unique addition to the action sequences. But it's her back and forth with Kon that make for surprisingly tender scenes and stand out moment. It spins the character plates while Kon, strangely enough, ends up dominating the entirety of the series.

In amongst the narrative revelations, long running gags wearing thin at well over the 300 episode mark and the drawn-out exposition, is a series about friendship versus solitude. The show persists with clear cut examples of both, but fascinating antagonist Kagerōza Inaba proves more complex than a simple stand-in for solitude. While he fends off his inevitable comeuppance,

there is room for moments of drama and moving subplots.

Episode 335, Hiding in the Dangai? Another Ichigo?!, is the most visually adventurous, while 341, Invading Army Arc, Final Conclusion!, is the highlight of the entire arc. The series closer, Thank You, isn't without merit, and its bittersweet conclusion invites the viewer back for the final series. Series 15 proves that Bleach still had a few interesting ideas in its penultimate outing. The essence might have been there, beneath all the padding, but it takes a lot of work on the viewer's part to get the same thrill those first few series gave.

Extras: Opening animation / Ending animation

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★ 6

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



The FINAL FANTASY VII Remake is Coming

Fans of **Final Fantasy VII** have been waiting for news of a remake from practically the moment the original game came out, especially when the likes of **VIII** and **IX** proved that the blocky graphics in **VII** weren't actually a necessity.

It's something that Square has teased numerous times in the past, particularly with a tech demo that they unveiled during the beginning of the PS3 years, but has never come to fruition.

Until now! During Sony's E3 conference, Square announced that they would finally be remaking the classic game, sending legions of fans into a celebratory uproar with the announcement.

We know little about the game at the moment, outside of the fact that the materia system will apparently be evolved and new story elements are to be added, but it's enough to get people excited that it has been announced in the first place.

It looks like the game will eventually find its way onto the Xbox One as well, as the announcement simply claimed that it was coming first onto the PS4. Either way, we can now anticipate a couple of years of hoping that Square don't screw it all up.

COMING SOON



METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

PLATFORM: PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

Possibly the most anticipated game in the series so far due to the fallout between Hideo Kojima and Konami, practically guaranteeing that we won't be seeing Metal Gear Solid in any recognisable form for a very long time, The Phantom Pain aims to pick up where Ground Zeroes left off. Reputedly 80 times the size of Kojima's bite-sized masterpiece, The Phantom Pain is guaranteed to shift units as soon as it hits the stores. Here's hoping Konami's issues don't affect the quality of the game.

COMING SOON



LEGO DIMENSIONS

PLATFORM: ALL

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 29TH

Following the template laid out by the likes of Disney Infinity, Dimensions will give the player the opportunity to bring all sorts of characters from the LEGO universe into the game to do battle against an evil masked villain who has invaded various worlds. It will be nice to see the company do something other than simply LEGO-fying the latest blockbuster releases, but you're going to need to have deep pockets if you are going to get the most out of the franchise.

SHENMUE 3 Announced

The term 'wish fulfilment' has never been more apt than when used for Sony's E3 conference, as not only did they announce the long-awaited **Final Fantasy VII** remake, but they also provided the platform for Yu Suzuki to declare that he is starting a Kickstarter to fund the making of **Shenmue 3**.

The Kickstarter had a base goal of \$2 million, which it hit in less than a day, and will be just finishing when you have this magazine in your hands.

A little bit of controversy was caused when it was revealed that Suzuki has also secured funding from a number of other sources, with some claiming the Kickstarter was simply a way to gauge interest more than anything else, but fans will be delighted regardless. After all, they have been waiting for 14 years for the continuation of Ryo Hazuki's story.

Microsoft Announce Xbox One to be Backwards Compatible

Sony wasn't the only company that impressed during E3, as Microsoft also put together a strong conference that featured news on a number of upcoming titles and seemed to focus a little bit more on existing and new franchises, rather than games of years gone by.

However, they caused perhaps the biggest stir of their conference with the announcement that they will be making the Xbox One backwards compatible with a large number of Xbox 360 titles.

While this may not seem particularly huge, especially for people who kept hold of their old Xbox consoles, it has been proven in the past that backwards compatibility is something that helps to sell consoles and with this announcement Microsoft certainly managed to get one over on Sony.

New SOUTH PARK Game Announced at E3

The last **South Park** game, **Stick of Truth**, was a bit of a sleeper hit when it was released and is a whole lot of fun to play. Simply put, it is better than every other **South Park** game ever made, combined.

So it is probably not shocking to many that another is on its way, with the announcement having been made at E3. The game is subtitled '**The Fractured but Whole**' and will see players reprising their role as the New Kid once again, this time taking in the Coon and Friends story arc. No release date has been announced, but the game will be available on PS4, Xbox One and PC.

If it matches the quality of the previous title it should be a damned fine game.

COMING SOON



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 5

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PS3, 360
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 29TH

Okay, so the **Tony Hawk** series may not be specifically genre-related – unless you count the guest appearances from the likes of **Spider-Man** and **Wolverine** in games gone past – but it is most definitely worth talking about the resurrection of the series. It seems like **Activision** has been waiting for gamers to forget how they utterly butchered the once-beloved franchise with needless peripherals. Whether this will be a return to glory is anyone's guess, and it kinda makes you wonder why **Activision** chose to shut **Neversoft** if they had this in the pipeline.

COMING SOON



MIGHTY NO. 9

PLATFORM: ALL

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 18TH

*Kickstarter strikes again, as **Mighty No. 9** is yet another interesting project that has been partly funded by the crowd-funding behemoth. This time we are looking at a creation from Keiji Inafune – of **Mega Man** fame – and it shows. Everything from the characters through to the way the game plays and is designed seems to scream **Mega Man** sequel, only without the branding that **Capcom** seem to have decided they don't need anymore. Expect some special things from this one and a healthy dose of retro-style action.*

Square Announce DEUS EX Documentary

Thanks to E3, we now all know that **Deus Ex: Mankind Divided** is completely official and on its way. It's going to have some pretty big shoes to fill considering the positive reception that **Human Revolution** received when it was released a few years back, never mind trying to live up to the original game in the series.

To celebrate the 15th anniversary of that first game, Square has decided to create a four-part documentary that will look at the ins and outs of the series, including interviews with developers and other titbits.

The first part, named **DX15: The Legacy of Deus Ex**, is already available online and looks at the first game. The next will look at the second and so on, with the final documentary likely looking towards the future. They should make for an interesting watch for anybody who is already a fan of the series.

UNCHARTED 4 May be the Last Nathan Drake Game

In what may be slightly sad news for **Uncharted** fans, it has been announced that the upcoming **Uncharted 4** will be the last game in the series for Nathan Drake, though whether this means it is also the last **Uncharted** or that the series will simply be going in a new direction following number 4 has yet to be confirmed.

Lead designer Kurt Margenau said in an interview: "[**Druckmann** and **Bruce Straley**], our directors, they have a vision [for **Uncharted 4**], we are fulfilling that vision and it's going to be awesome. It's **Nathan Drake's** final chapter, so I think fans are going to be happy."

Regardless, it is unlikely that the game is going to be anything less than awesome and it will be interesting to see where **Naughty Dog** take the series from here without Drake. Could we possibly be waiting on the game that kills off gaming's most accomplished Indy clone? Only time will tell.

Microsoft Struggles in Japan

While there is no disputing that the console war is dominated by Sony and Microsoft this time around, with Nintendo's **Wii U** coming such a distant third in every territory except Japan that the company are already working on developing a new console, it appears that Microsoft are only going to be able to do battle on the western front if recent sales figures from the **Land of the Rising Sun** are any indicator.

During the week of June 15-21st, the company only managed to shift a tiny 100 units in all of Japan, leaving them suitably dwarfed by every console currently offered by Sony and Nintendo by at least 10,000 apiece.

Japan has practically snubbed the Xbox brand since it came onto the scene, and you have to wonder if the company sees any sort of point in operating there at all, or if they do it simply to claim their console is international.



Gamer Pre-Orders FALLOUT 4 with Bottle Caps

It's not often that gamers get away with being a little bit cheeky when they try to pre-order a game, but Imgur user 'GatorMacheteJr' has managed it after he shipped a ridiculous 11 pounds of bottle caps to Bethesda HQ in an effort to pre-order the recently announced **Fallout 4**.

Apparently, Mr... erm Machete had saved the caps over the course of about seven years after **Fallout 3** became one of his favourite games of all time, eventually shipping them off a few weeks back.

Never ones to miss out on a good PR opportunity, Bethesda have actually accepted the caps as a form of payment for the game, but they were quick to stress that this would be a one-time only deal, lest they end up covered in a deluge of bottle caps from gamers across the globe.

GatorMacheteJr posted an update when the offer was accepted, stating: "[Bethesda] told me since I was the first person to do this, I would be receiving a copy of the game this November, and that [they] would be running my caps over to deposit them at the People's Bank of Point Lookout."

We think it would have been a lot easier to just pre-order the game using normal money, but then this is probably what makes us less prepared for any post-apocalyptic worlds we may end up finding ourselves in.

COMING SOON



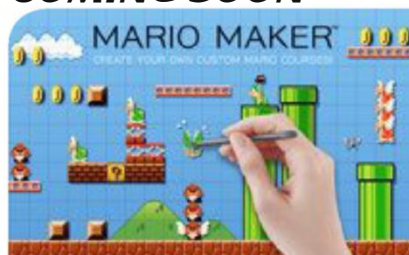
MAD MAX

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 4TH

With *Fury Road* having done a simply amazing job of bringing *Mad Max* to a modern audience while still keeping so much of what older fans loved intact, the pressure is now on Avalanche Studios to match the achievement with their *Mad Max* game. The title will be set within the universe of the films, likely taking some cues from each one along the way, and will offer an enormous open world featuring races and vehicular combat. If they can even scratch the surface of the intense brilliance of the chases in *Fury Road*, Avalanche may be on to a winner.

COMING SOON



SUPER MARIO MAKER

PLATFORM: WII U

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 11TH

No doubt taking their cues from the *LittleBigPlanet* series, Nintendo are bringing this rather interesting level creation software to players, allowing them to create their very own Mario levels. If that's not enough, it will also be shipping with another 100 pre-made, which means the game could pretty much justify the purchase of the console alone. If the end product matches the potential then it should be one of the Wii U's biggest killer apps and a must-have for any gamer's collection.

Apple Remove Games with Confederate Flag from Store

Following the racially-motivated shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, Apple have been quick to respond by removing any games from their app store that make heavy use of iconography that involves the Confederate flag.

While some titles, such as those that revolve around the American Civil War, will likely be granted a little leniency on the issue, for the time being it looks like this is a blanket decision from the company in an effort to ensure none of the games on the store offend anybody who was affected by the tragedy.

Remastered CALL OF DUTY Games May be Coming

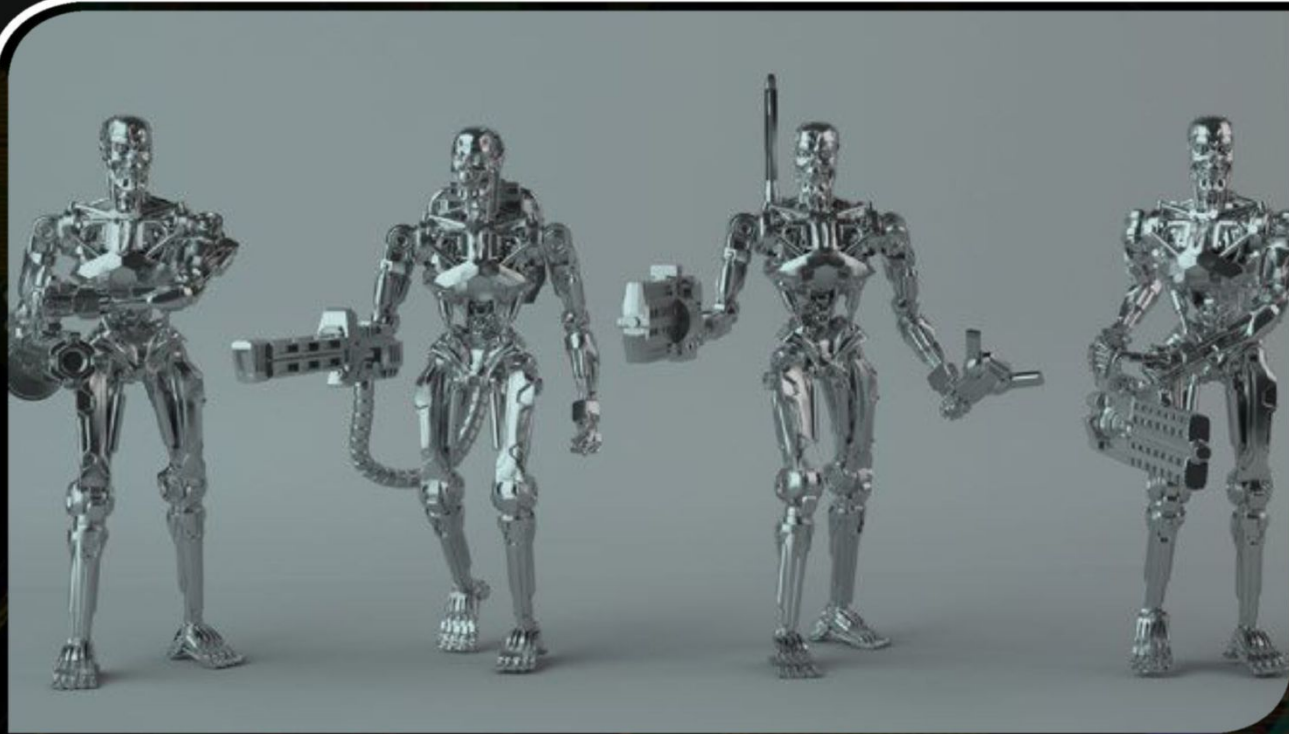
Apparently not content with the fact that the *Call of Duty* franchise dominates practically every Christmas period with its turgid rereleasing of the same game, bar the latest one which was just as boring but set in the future, Activision are currently mulling over the idea of remastering some of the older games in the series.

It doesn't look like they would be dipping into the games that came before *Modern Warfare* either, as Activision Publishing CEO Eric Hirshberg commented: "If done well, I think [remasters] can be great. You talk about nostalgia, and people have such connection to the games they love from the last cycle. They want to see what it would look like if someone did it right for this cycle." He then went on to say he would love to see *Modern Warfare* or *Black Ops* get the treatment.

Remastering games is the 'in' thing to do at the moment, but surely titles from the last generation should be out of bounds for a little while. After all, there is only so much benefit such games are going to see from a new touch of paint.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



TERMINATOR GENISYS: THE MINIATURES GAME – THE WAR AGAINST THE MACHINES

DESIGNER: ALESSIO CAVATORE / PUBLISHER: RIVER HORSE GAMES / DISTRIBUTOR: WARLORD GAMES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Terminator-style skeletal robot monsters are pretty common creatures in sci-fi wargames, so it's a bit surprising that there hasn't been an official Terminator miniatures game until now. Terminator Genisys – The Miniatures Game is a rather lavish product, filled with brave rebels and robotic nightmares that allow you to simulate mankind's struggle against the forces of Skynet.

The set comes with a total of 32 models; you get a single Kyle Reese model, made out of some sort of metal and sculpted by industry legend Michael Perry; the set also includes 16 resistance fighters in rather nice 'army man' green plastic; and the rest of the collection is made up of silver/greyish plastic terminators, 10 of which are standing and the rest are crawling like the horrible robot corpses they are. The plastic models pop together easily, though be aware that they are a little fragile, but then most miniatures are.

The mandatory card counters are reasonably well made from thick card stock. The set also has pop-out cardboard barriers that are pretty easy to slot together. Experienced gamers will probably want to ignore this in favour of terrain pieces they already have, but it's nice that they're

included. You also get a board large enough to cover most gaming tables, printed on glossy poster paper that's reasonably robust. It's also appropriately detailed; there are loads of skulls everywhere. There are also stickers, designed for marking out commanders and the like.

The core mechanics rely on different types of polyhedral dice. Rather than taking penalties or bonuses, you change the actual type of dice you're rolling, for example, going from a d6 to a d8 when you find better cover. Movement and range-finding use bespoke cardboard rulers. Turn order for each model is worked out by rolling for activation counters, using those counters to activate models, and then letting your opponent do the same. You go back and forth until everything on the board has acted. This makes for an anarchic but elegant battle. The rules are comprehensive and include information on Hunter/Killer tanks and Humvees.

Various elements that make the franchise memorable have been worked into the game's rules quite cunningly. For example, rather than simply having a re-roll counter (a common mechanic in miniatures games) you have Temporal Displacement Devices; a set

of mechanics that represent someone going back in time to change history so you have a better chance of winning the battle. Your opponent can counter the re-roll by sending his own agent back in time to stop him. Even though the actual mechanic is a simple 'who rolls highest' test, this little bit of flavour adds immeasurably to the game.

Other nice attentions to detail include the factor that the endoskeletons never take cover (they are well-armoured, after all) and the fact that the cover rules are quite comprehensive, meaning that the resistance forces will be constantly ducking behind things to avoid being shot. This makes the two forces work very differently and makes for a varied game.

The rule-book is also very detailed, and filled with modelling tips as well as loads of scenarios to run. Over all, this is a very nice start to what Riverhorse hope will become a major series of games. It certainly deserves to do well, it's a great game filled with clever ideas.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC, MAC, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Four years have passed since *Batman: Arkham City*, the free-roaming Batman masterpiece and sequel to the revolutionary *Arkham Asylum*. In that time, we've had a cinematic *Dark Knight Rises*, several *Lego Batmen*, and even an *Arkham* prequel in the shape of the spotty (but essentially fine) *Arkham Origins*. Now, after what seems like an age, Rocksteady have released the final part in their trilogy, the eagerly-awaited *Arkham Knight*.

Who? It's a title that doesn't refer to Batman himself, instead being a mysterious masked figure working with Big Bad Scarecrow to destroy both the Batman and Gotham City. Nothing to do with the Joker, then, whose death at the end of *Arkham City* seems to have stuck. Or does it? Well, this is answered within the game's opening seconds in a manner one might consider pretty definitively, but we've learned by now never to underestimate the Clown Prince of Crime. Or, for that matter, the smart storytelling mechanics by Rocksteady and the game's writers. From the first game's Scarecrow levels to the sequel's weird little Mad Hatter diversion and brave ending, the *Arkham* series has always had an eye for the surreal, and this one is no different.

That sense of familiarity carries through to everything else though, which feels disappointingly similar to previous

outings at times. It certainly tries to shake things up with the introduction of the Batmobile, but there's nothing to compare to that feeling of walking down the corridors of *Arkham* for the first time, or swooping across Gotham's skyline in *Arkham City*. The Batmobile is the biggest addition to the franchise's bag of tricks, but there's development to the gameplay everywhere. Players can now get their hands on Commissioner Gordon and various other non-Batman characters (hello again, Catwoman), and the game's first person opening is an amazing exercise in setup. That's spoiled somewhat by yet another evacuation of the city, but this tantalising glimpse of a living, breathing Gotham is welcome.

Combat has been revamped too, making it even more fluid and allowing for such fantastic new brutalities as environmental takedowns (think the old *Batman Returns* side-scroller, except bloodier), Batmobile-assisted violence and the use of fallen enemies' weapons against their own comrades. If you thought *Arkham Batman* was a bit of a bastard before, wait until you're given the opportunity to lay into a whole roomful of goons with a metal rod. The 'no killing' rule is still intact, but it feels stretched to A-Team level proportions, with the game letting you lay waste to swathes of poor unprepared underlings, running them over with the Batmobile or blasting at them with non-lethal (yeah right) artillery fire. The game really earns its 18 rating, from the surprisingly grim opening, to the level of sadism doled out by Batman unto his low-level working class enemies. By the time you're asked to use a bit of torture



interrogation ripped straight out of the PS2's *Punisher*, it's all starting to look a bit Guantanamo Bat: Arkham Edition.

But then subtlety has never been the Arkham series' forte. The wonderful gameplay smooths over all of the cracks there, with its every mechanic working so well. It's been worth the wait for the Batmobile, which is immensely fun to tear about the city in, no matter how much the game tries to ruin it for you by shoe-horning it into every set-piece. It's a faster, less realistic Tumbler and is as ridiculously overpowered as every other aspect of Arkham Batman.

Outside of the main story, challenge rooms, unlockables and side quests will keep you going for a while, with some great villains popping up to get their faces punched in on a regular basis (one of whom gives the game an incredible jump scare). The utterly bonkers story will have you hooked until the end – and there are plenty of Riddler challenges to keep you going for a long time after that. The latter being the most irritating he's ever been, by the way, making us resent our own Batmobile with his stupid challenges and short-sleeved shirt. Come back Jim Carrey, all is forgiven.

Arkham Knight is a barnstorming end to gaming's best ever superhero series. It may spin on its wheels a little (Batmobile? Pain in the ass-mobile) and it has some serious issues with its characterisation and writing (every female in the game is depicted as a Damsel in Distress at some point, and Catwoman still hasn't pulled up her boob zipper) but in closing the trilogy, it does a great job. There's a sense of escalation that even *The Dark Knight Rises* could have learned from – managing that without sinking to having Alfred give away the ending during the first hour. It's as cinematic as videogames get, up there with *Metal Gear Solid* from a storytelling perspective.

It did, however, leave this Batfan with an odd aftertaste. Remember those bits in Arkham Asylum, where you swoop about rescuing inmates (criminals!) from rooms full of poisonous gas? Maybe Arkham Knight could have done with just a little more of that, and maybe slightly less gleeful Frank Miller-esque brutality and torture of poor dimwits and the mentally ill. Arkham Knight left me with the distinct impression that Batman is kind of a raging psychopath (darkness! No parents!) and that's just a depressing and sour note to end on, given how popular this incarnation of the character is. Everything isn't awesome, then, but it so very nearly is.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★ 8

STARBURST

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



to make something altogether more useful. Homing flamethrower? Grab the homing missiles and the fireballs, press the weapon selection button a couple of times to combine the two together, and there you have it!

After making your way through the first four levels, your next stop is... a board game! You weren't expecting that, were you? Roll the dice to determine how many moves you make, and you'll either end up on a 'fight' square (taking you to a mini boss battle) or an item square (giving you health and the option to change weapons). Assuming you manage to avoid the awful 'return to start' square right at the end of the board, your next stop is a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up through space! A final gauntlet-style encounter sees you taking on most of the previous end of level bosses one after the other, which manages to be both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time.

Treasure really do throw a fair amount of different mechanics at you through the course of this game, and it's to their credit that nothing feels awkward or out of place. If they could come up with something this good for their first game, imagine what they might come up with next!

McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure (Mega Drive, 1993)

Erm... ok then. There's a pattern developing here - expect the unexpected with these Treasure people! Released just two weeks after *Gunstar Heroes*, this Technicolor platforming burger-'em-up is genuinely a bit

Back in the early 1990s, several employees at major Japanese developer Konami were growing weary of the restrictions forced upon them by their bosses. Deciding they would be much happier doing things their own way, a handful of talented folk decided to leave Konami and start their own company. This new company was named Treasure, and over the years they came out with a huge amount of top quality games. Let's work our way through a few of them, starting at the very beginning and ending at the bottom of the next page!

Gunstar Heroes (Mega Drive, 1993)

Treasure's first release was a side-scrolling run n' gunner, with a manga-style story revolving around an all-conquering robot and an evil dictator. The first four levels can be played in any order, taking you through some truly beautiful 16-bit locations filled with all manner of human and robot enemies. The minecart level is a particular highlight during the first half of the game, zipping along at a fair old pace that really is a marvel when you consider how many enemies and projectiles and explosions might also be on screen at the same time.

Of course, there are boss battles at the end of each level, and these are another notable thing about *Gunstar Heroes*. Many of the boss fights take part in multiple

stages, with bosses often mutating into secondary forms which require a whole new plan of attack to defeat. Your hand to hand combat isn't really that good (punches, jumping kicks, and throws are all available if you want them), but luckily, *Gunstar Heroes* features a really awesome innovation in the tools of mass destruction department. Players are able to carry any two from a selection of four available weapons, and these can be used either individually or combined together at the press of a button



STARBURST

of a treat. The name of the game gives the plot away nicely, which is helpful because it saves us having to tell you what happens. Ronald McDonald, treasure, adventure. And some land, because you need that for the platforming bits.

Gameplay-wise it's pretty standard fare - one button to jump, one to fire a sparkly magic attack, and one to throw your scarf upwards, grabbing onto ledges and propelling yourself up to higher platforms. Along the way you'll collect jewels for health, flowers that don't seem to do anything at all, and gold which you can use at shops to buy health and useful items such as extra lives or balloons that will rescue you if you happen to fall off the screen. You'll also meet many familiar faces from the Maccy D's franchise, and there's even a McDonald's themed version of *Columns* hidden away as a playable minigame.

There's a huge variety of wacky enemies, including bulbous cat-faced bipedal unicorn things, metal-shelled turtles, gnomes, dragons, robots, ghosts, and these weird furry dog cloud things. Perhaps we should have saved this column for issue 420! Everything is fairly easy to kill with the sparkly magic attack though, and the platforming doesn't get too difficult until the final level where Ronald goes to the moon and has to contend with some fairly tricky jumping sequences. The only real let-down is the boss fights - they all look great, but each one is defeated in exactly the same way, which sort of lessens the appeal of finding out what you're going to be up against next. It's a minor nit-pick, though, in an otherwise fine example of platforming stupidity. If we did ratings, this would get a solid 8 out of 10!

Dynamite Headdy (Mega Drive, 1994)

Next up, another platformer with many similarities to Mr McDonald's adventure. Headdy is a puppet with a detachable head, which can be fired around the screen to attack enemies and retrieve items. The platforming is taken straight



from *Treasure Land*, even including the upwards grapple move, except this time it's performed by grappling with your own head rather than flicking a brightly coloured scarf about the place. Levels are much bigger here, and the platforming requires much more concentration and precision. Later levels include puzzle elements that really do need a bit of thought before you go charging in blindly.

A selection of power-ups has been included to give the player a range of different abilities. Fire shields, vacuum cleaners, super speed/strength, invisibility, and loads of other powers are at your disposal, and you'll need them to get past the huge array of bad guys and bosses, some of whom are so huge that they almost fill the entire screen! *Dynamite Headdy* presents a solid challenge, but as an overall package, it's easily up there with the best 16-bit platformers. Take your time, don't do anything silly, and see if you can make it to the end!

Alien Soldier (Mega Drive, 1995)

Oh my goodness. I've been told not to swear, but if I could, I would. In a good way though,

you understand. Like in *Team America* when they say "America! Huck yeah!" Except this is *Alien Soldier*. Huck yeah!

What we have here is a series of tiny short levels followed by huge high-octane pulse-pounding boss fights. More than 30 of them, in fact. The whole game is pretty much just boss fights. There are skeletal dragons, mutants, robots, animals, spaceships, and all sorts of other big baddies for you to blow to smithereens using your choice of powerful futuristic space weaponry. But just because the levels are short, doesn't mean *Treasure* skimped on the minor bad guy design. Waddling cyclops cocoons with huge gaping mouths, big brightly coloured slimy abominations, pesky flying jerks, environmental hazards, it's got everything you could possibly want in a blast-'em-up of this nature.

What about those weapons? At the start of the game, players can equip four of a possible six weapons, and any one can be swapped out for another at any point during gameplay. You sort of expect to be able to swap weapons during a game these days, but twenty years ago, having the option of four different weapons in a game like this was really something special! You also get a few special tricks to play with such as a counter move, the ability to hover, and a teleport manoeuvre which can be charged up to deal massive damage to anything in your path.

Awesome soundtrack, awesome enemies, awesome combat, awesome backstory that really doesn't matter in the slightest, awesome game. Awesome! Huck yeah!

In later years, *Treasure* were also responsible for many iconic and influential games such as *Guardian Heroes*, *Sin and Punishment*, and *Ikaruga*. And they were even allowed to get their hands on one of Nintendo's top franchises, being in charge of *Wario World* on the Gamecube. We'll surely come to all of these at some point in the future, but we're just about out of time for this month. This is the bottom of the page now, look. Thanks for sticking around for the last however many words it's been. See you again soon!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



the title turns out to have more than one meaning as they swiftly find themselves on a very strange dungeon crawl. The corridors aren't made of stone, rather everything is metal and some strange pliable material which is too smooth to be wood. Many of the monsters also seem to be made of metal, with strange wand-like weapons that don't seem to operate on magic. There are no locks to pick, and the doors are only opened by inserting oddly-lacquered cards into the right slot.

Or to put it another way, this is a *D&D* adventure set in a spaceship, and it crosses the boundary between fantasy and sci-fi. Gygas wrote this as a backdoor pilot of sorts. He wanted to see if gamers had any interest in science fiction (of course they did) and this led to *Metamorphosis Alpha*, a game about a huge starship that had descended into barbarism over the generations.

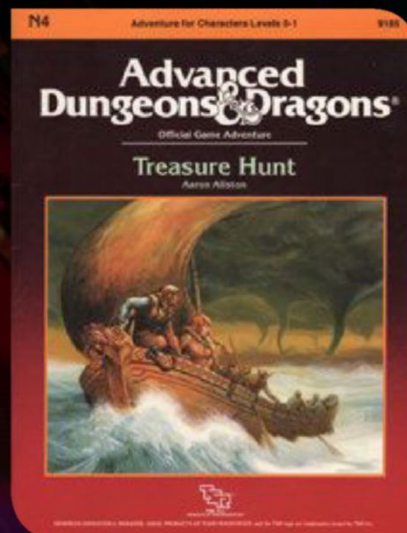
Curse of the Azure Bonds is a game so popular that it got its own novel and a video game; yet it rarely gets mentioned these days. The plot was quite fun; player characters wake up to discover that they've received a mysterious blue tattoo, and have shaky memories as to how that happened. The video game (and the book) both follow the misadventures of Alias, a sell-sword who wakes up in a similar way. As the plot continues, the players learn they're mixed up in a terrible plot to create an army of superior clones for an evil cult, and the tattoos are a method of making and controlling these clones. It's a very *Forgotten Realms* adventure, filled with old gods looking for new powers and sinister cults. It's also fondly remembered

Sometimes, you just have to give in to nostalgia. Regular readers of this column may have gathered that I'm in the middle of a massive *Dungeons and Dragons* tabletop campaign, testing the rather wonderful Fifth Edition. Our long suffering Dungeon Master is running Kobold Press's *Tyranny of Dragons* adventures, and one of the reasons it's so much fun is because it reminds all the players round the table (many of whom are quite ancient) of adventures gone by.

With that in mind, let's take a quick look at some classic *D&D* adventures from back in the day. If you don't play table top RPGs, you may be confused as to why they're called 'modules'. The best explanation I've heard is that because adventures are piecemeal in nature; they're modular. Which is as a good a reason as any. For now, we'll skip past some of the more obvious classics. We'll get to Hammer Horror tribute act *Ravenloft* and *The Temple of Elemental Evil* in another column.

Treasure Hunt was an *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* by Aaron Allston, who would go on to write various *Star Wars* novels. *Treasure Hunt* was also the first RPG I ever played, and what a clever little adventure it is. Your character is kidnapped by slavers (along with the other PCs), and when the ship wrecks itself on a mysterious island, you and the rest of the party discover that you're many miles away from home, with no armour, weapons or anything, really. Worse still, you're all level zero; you have no character class or special abilities. Instead, the Dungeon Master assigns class and alignment to you depending on your actions. It's a great introduction to the game, and it still surprises me that it's not a common approach to character creations.

Expedition to Barrier Peaks blew my tiny mind when I played it, though I was quite small at the time. It begins as a pretty standard trip into the mountains to go looting. However, the barrier mentioned in



for an amazing Larry Elmore painting of the redheaded sellsword Alias. (The book even attempts to justify Alias' chainmail bikini, claiming that the gap in the middle is part of the armour's magical powers. Oh dear me.)

The Great Modron March was an adventure module for the rather unique AD&D setting, *Planescape*. Most geeks know *Planescape* via its videogame adaptation, *Planescape: Torment*, and *Torment* certainly gave many people a good glimpse into this reality-hopping setting that saw players wandering around various planes of reality, from the elemental planes of water all the way to the Nine Hells of Baator. Modrons come from the plane of Mechanus, where everything is perfectly ordered and machine-like, and are essentially living cogs. They're also sort of cute, thanks to their innocent approach to the planes and their simple design. (The fact that the artist Tony DiTerlizzi made them look amazing also helped.) The scenario sees the geometric beasties go on the rampage as they seek to 'catalogue' the planes themselves. Players get involved, trying to limit the damage this mass migration will cause. The events of the *Modron March* have a knock-on effect to another scenario, *Dead Gods*, and though that's often quoted as the best *Planescape* story out there, *Modron March* has the advantage of being a good way to get new players into the weird rules and setting. It's much less 'combat' orientated than traditional D&D adventures, but as wild adventures go, it's one of my favourites.

Voyage of the Golden Dragon is another favourite of mine, and for reasons similar to the *Modron March*, it's a great way of getting players into a particular setting. In this case, the marvellously intricate *Eberron*, a fantasy world where magic replaces science but technology continues to move on. *Eberron* has guilds of magic users who operate a lot like corporations do in the real world. For example, House Jorasco are a guild of



healers who charge for their services. Many have the magical power to heal, but many more are simple bone-setters and poultice makers. In *Voyage of the Golden Dragon*, the players are employed as guards aboard a marvellous airship. The *Golden Dragon* was once the greatest war machine ever seen, but now that the war is over it's been converted into a pleasure craft. Various factions still hold grudges, and the adventure takes the players not only on a whistle stop tour of the world, but also explains some of the bigger factions. There's a lot of swashbuckling and a fair amount of action throughout, and when we played it, we managed to break practically every magical item, which was a lot of fun.

Death's Ride on the other hand, was frustratingly vague about its setting, not that it mattered. Ostensibly set in the Basic D&D world of *Mystara*, it's about a Barony that has ceased all communication. Worse still, a rolling black cloud of death seems to be set

on ending it all for the surrounding towns and villages. The players are given free rein to poke the region with their swords, and pretty much whatever they do will end in a huge fight. The adventure has a nice set-piece ending featuring a dragon and a small army, and it's a great example of a sandbox-style adventure, written long before the term 'sandbox' was coined.

Going back to another setting-specific adventure, there is of course the marvellous *Vecna Lives!* Vecna is the necromancer from the *Greyhawk* setting who carelessly left his (enchanted) body parts laying around for adventurers to misuse. It starts in one of the most marvellous ways. You hand each player a character sheet which has the full stats for an arch-wizard. Experienced players might get suspicious at this point, but when I played it most people just got terribly excited instead. Vecna arrives, having gained demi-god status and wipes out all the characters. The game then begins normally, the players having taken part in a rather fine opening sequence that should make them very concerned for the health of their characters.

I have, of course, missed an absolute wealth of modules this time round, and I haven't even dipped into the marvellous sack of crazy that are the various *Dragonlance* modules. You may notice that I'm rather fond of starting adventures, and that's pretty much because I really like getting into a new campaign. Of course, we've gotten really good at creating ways of getting people into roleplaying games as the years have gone by. A good example is games designer Monte Cook's project, *No Thank You, Evil*, a tabletop roleplaying game aimed specifically at young people. It recently aced its crowd-funding campaign, and as a fan of starting adventures, I can't wait to see what the finished product will be like.

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



JAKE A CHANCE ON THESE FINN-TASTIC SHIRTS!

In an age of ambivalent modern children's TV, many find it hard to pick out a highlight, but Pendleton Ward's hand drawn Fantasy series **Adventure Time** can be called just that. Looking at the adventures of human boy Finn and his magical dog Jake, **Adventure Time**'s heavily **Dungeons & Dragons**-indebted narrative and style has led to the show attaining a massive fandom. So, how best to celebrate your love of the show? Well there is the **alltheheroes.co.uk Adventure Time** T-shirt range of course, which has a shirt to suit every discerning fan of Jake and Finn's epic adventures.

Whether it is the show's logo, its two rambunctious main characters, or an awesomely comforting quote you are after, one of these colourful and artistically exciting shirts is there for you. **Adventure Time** is eccentric,

interesting and hyper at times, so pay tribute to the show by living that way of life in one of these 'totes amaze balls' shirts that are perfect for lounging around in over summer. And best of all, you don't have to go on a quest to grab one, you can just log in, log on and then it is all signed, sealed, delivered... "easy peasy, livin' breezy".

ADVENTURE TIME T-SHIRT RANGE:

FINN, JAKE POCKET, ALGEBRAIC, AMAZE-BALLS, LOGO, RAINBOW CAST, ALWAYS BE YOURSELF, CHILL OUT DUDE OR GROUP SPLAT

ALL PRICED £11.75 EACH

AVAILABLE FROM ALLTHEHEROES.CO.UK

NICK OF THE WEEK!

In time for San Diego Comic-Con earlier this month, pop artist Plastic God (**plasticgod.com**) created these fantastic 6-inch-high range of Nick Cave toys. Limited Edition (only 200 of each model is being made) and future collector's items for sure, these immaculately designed and massively stylish toys are a must for fans of the Australian icon of pop culture. The range is inspired by Cave's music work as part of Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds, and making up the range are: 'Red Right Hand', 'Into My Arms', 'Tupelo', 'Babe You Turn Me On' and 'Ship Song'. Each model is unique and as innovative looking as you would come to expect any toy based on the image of Nick Cave would be.



NICK CAVE VINYL TOYS RANGE:

'RED RIGHT HAND', 'BABE, YOU TURN ME ON', 'SHIP SONG', 'TUPELO', 'INTO MY ARMS'

ALL PRICED \$40 USD EACH

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STARBURST



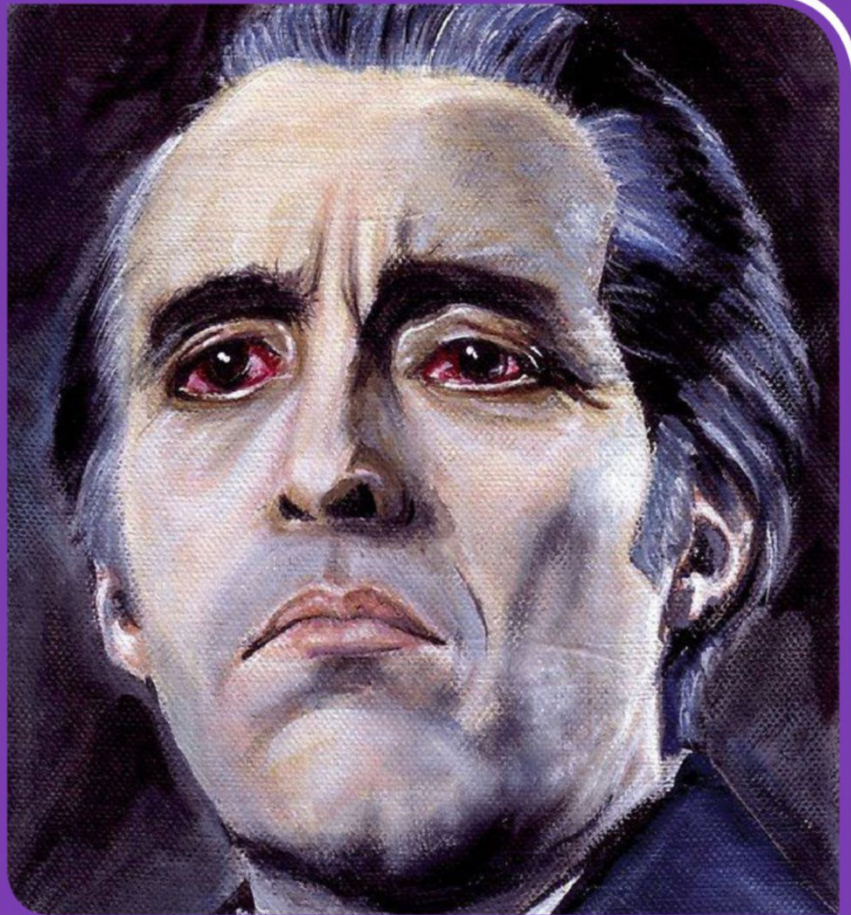
SPY WEAR AND AN EMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL

We have been all about those of the spying kind this issue, ahead of Guy Ritchie's remake of **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.** TV series. So to celebrate said TV series one step further, why not trace your way through **timetunnelshirts.com** and find this snazzy shirt decorated with the classic insignia of Sam Rolfe's memorable show. The shirt may not turn you into a handsome, super-capable master of espionage, but it will keep you cool on a warm day and furthermore sift out those who know their classic shows - sadly others will just think you have come from your uncle's house.

Spies may have populated this issue but if you turn the mag inside out (ahem), you will find a little brimming corner of it heralding another masterwork from Pixar Animation Studios. Their newest film, **Inside Out**, gets inside humanity's emotions and the results are moving, funny and adorable. Critics have raved about the film - see our equally ravey review on page 81 - so, as it is about to hit cinemas (from July 24th here in good Ol' Blighty) why not get in on the merchandising craze that is about to ensue? You can do this by heading over to the House of Mouse's online UK store (**disneystore.co.uk**) and finding these wonderful dolls of the film's central characters. Joy, Anger, Sadness, Fear, and Disgust make up the group and each light up, utter numerous movie phrases and, best of all, have a section in which you can insert a picture of yourself or a loved one... although be careful, we're not sure how mum or dad would take their mugs being put on a Disgust doll!

MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E T-SHIRT - £15.99
AVAILABLE FROM **TIMETUNNELSHIRTS.COM**

JOY, ANGER, SADNESS, FEAR, DISGUST
TALKING DOLLS
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CE-LEE-BRATE THE ICON

In the time between issues, the movie world was deeply saddened by the passing of the great Christopher Lee and we here at STARBURST were particularly affected by the loss of such an influential figure in many genres of cinema (see our tribute to Sir Christopher on page 8). Christopher Lee's career spanned generations and his memorable characters, from Hammer's **Dracula** to **The Wicker Man**'s Lord Summerisle and **Star Wars**' Count Dooku to **Lord of the Rings**' Saruman, will live on forever in horror, fantasy and sci-fi cinema, as will all of Lee's powerful and omnipotent performances in his expansive CV that spans more than 200 feature films. So what better way to celebrate cinema's greatest voice than with this awesome Canvas Print range by Rouble Rust from **RedBubble.co.uk**. Prices vary depending on size but this amazingly designed artwork of the ultimate onscreen Dracula is impossible to turn down for any Hammer Horror fan. Fangs for the memories Sir Christopher, you will be much missed.

"HE IS THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THAT IS EVIL"
CHRISTOPHER LEE'S DRACULA CANVAS PRINT
£43.81 - £98.58 (DEPENDENT ON SIZE)
AVAILABLE FROM **REDBUBBLE.CO.UK**



STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: MARTIN UNSWORTH
PHOTOS: JAMES FIELDING

For its second year, the official Gerry Anderson celebration, **ANDERCON**, changed the location and set up in the stunning art deco surroundings of Athena in Leicester. A well-laid out place which allowed the bustling atmosphere of the event to be maintained while giving everyone – traders, guests and displayers included – enough room not to feel stifled or cramped.

ANDERCON took off in style with a pre-con night over at the Phoenix Cinema and Arts Centre, with an evening of presentations and panels including a fascinating talk from author Sean Feast, whose book *A Thunder Bird in Bomber Command* details the life of Gerry Anderson's brother Lionel, whose RAF career influenced his later endeavours. There was also a reunion of the Tracy brothers – with actors Shane Rimmer, Matt Zimmerman, Jeremy Wilkin and David Graham taking to the stage for a chat. The evening was rounded off with a HD screening of *Thunderbirds* episode *Trapped in the Sky*, complete with the original ATV title cards and adverts!

Come Saturday and the show really got on the road, with Athena opening its doors to the hundreds who braved queuing in the rain. Upon entry, they were met with Scott Tracy, sat in his chair, and the puppet recreation of Cliff Richard (Jr) and the



Shadows from the *Thunderbirds Are Go* film, recently re-released on Blu-ray and screened to the fans later that day. One of TV's most iconic spaceships, the Eagle Transporter from *Space 1999*, was also there in the foyer for people to examine (look with your eyes not your hands, mind!) at close range.

Once into the main hall, it's clear that lots of thought had gone into the layout and organisation, since everything you could possibly need was within easy reach. In the bar area (always essential) were the guests, all ready and willing to sign autographs and chat with fans. Despite being regulars on the convention circuit, they were all very busy and spent plenty of time with everyone telling stories from behind the scenes and generally reminiscing.

The rest of the space was made up with a mix of traders, artists (including the legendary Mike Noble, whose comic work graced the pages of *TV21* and *Look-In*) and prop displays. While many of these were recreations made by fans, the detail and craft involved was stunning. And with most of the original props and puppets long gone or in private hands, this is the next best thing.

Other Saturday highlights included a screening of *The Day After Tomorrow: Into Infinity*, the grim but brilliant adventure that should have spun-off to a series but didn't, complete with an introductory interview with former child star Kate Levy.

The puppets also took centre stage at one point, with an enthralling presentation by Judy Preece and Richard Gregory. As well as demonstrating the classic *Thunderbirds* figures we've known and

loved all these years, they gave the audience a first-hand look at how the new 'Ultramarionation' process will work, and showed off early test footage of the eagerly-awaited series *Firestorm*.

Disbanding for a few hours, everyone returned in the evening for a 'secret briefing' session, which included an entertaining chat between Jamie Anderson and author M. G. Harris about the *Gemini Force 1* series, the first book, *Black Horizon*, having been available for a while, and the second, *Ghost Mine*, due in September. The evening was topped off with a screening of an episode from Series Two of *Space 1999*, only 'remixed' as it were, in the style of the first series. With that, everyone went on their merry way to chat in their respective hotel bars and enjoy the Leicester nightlife.

It's probably due to that enjoyment that the Sunday session had a much more low-key feel to it. Not a bad thing, by the way. In amongst the screenings were some more very interesting panels; the brilliant *UFO* was represented with a reunion of cast members Jeremy Wilkin, Georgina Moon and Ayshea Brough, and an interesting chat between author Marcus Hearn and music historian Ralph Titterton about the music of Barry Gray, whose work added so much to the shows of Gerry Anderson.

It was certainly a weekend of celebration and forward-thinking, rather than one of melancholy and remembrance. Jamie Anderson is determined to ensure his father's memory lives on, and from the look of the footage shown over the weekend of *Firestorm*, and talk of other endeavours, it's likely that it will do.



ON TALES OF BARDIC FURY

A psychedelic mix of Asterix and Father Ted
Steven Walsh, Gosh Comics

Gloriously silly, funny and gorgeous to look at, I
highly recommend giving this book a go.
If These Books Could Talk



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BARDIC FURY



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PAUL MOUNT'S



As STARBURST celebrates the glory days of television science fiction/fantasy, we pause to ponder the future of the genre on UK TV in the wake of the failure of BBC One's lavish adaptation of JONATHAN STRANGE AND MR NORRELL...

Call me a gloomy old harbinger of doom if you must, but I have a sinking feeling that May 17th, 2015 could be a Red Letter Day in the history of British television and it's on/off love/hate relationship with our kind of shows. British TV and science fiction/fantasy have been uneasy bedfellows for some time but it wasn't always thus. There was a time, long, long ago, when TV sci-fi (or whatever you prefer to call it) was a valid, legitimate and – get this – popular part of the TV landscape and viewers didn't turn off in droves (as they appear to do today) at the sight of something which doesn't

involve singing, dancing, and voting or, in the case of a drama series or serial, isn't a soap opera or another by-the-numbers maverick detective *who doesn't play by the rules*. May 17th was the date BBC One aired the first episode of its much-awaited, generously-budgeted, eighteen-months-in-the-making, high profile seven-week adaptation of Susanna Clarke's formidable fantasy novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. The show's ratings tumbled from a disappointing 5.7 million for the first episode to just over a million and a half for the finale (the show rated so poorly it dropped right out of BBC One's

weekly Top 30 after its first episode and final consolidated figures aren't publicly available for the rest – but we're betting they're not very healthy).

So what, you may cry – TV shows are crashing and burning all the time. This is true, but recent history worryingly records too many UK-generated fantasy shows (let's not worry about calling them science fiction, that's still a term which brings UK TV executives out in pustules and boils) which just haven't been able to attract or maintain significant audiences and have often rated so poorly they don't even qualify as reaching a cult audience.

2005 was where the sleeping beast of British genre telly began to stir again. Against all the expectations of focus group reports and sneering ITV executives, Russell T Davies' joyous, colourful revamp of *Doctor Who* silenced the naysayers who had decided that there was no longer an audience for Saturday night family drama and, as the show became not just a big hit but a bloody huge phenomenon, TV execs realised that maybe British TV audiences actually were still up for something a bit more demanding than cops and robbers, hospitals, reality, makeover, and talent shows. At first, things looked pretty promising. BBC One followed up *Doctor Who* with *Robin Hood* and *Merlin* and ITV enjoyed some success with the first couple of series of their prehistoric monster-chasing drama *Primeval*. Almost coincidentally, and shortly after the return of *Doctor Who*, BBC One scored a huge hit with *Life On Mars*, the gripping and compelling drama which appeared to see John Simm's twenty-first century detective Sam Tyler projected back to 1973 after a road accident. Yoof channel BBC Three scored a big crossover hit with *Being Human*, in which a vampire, a werewolf and a ghost found themselves living under the same roof. It starred him off *Poldark* (steady, girls!). *Doctor Who* itself begat the often patchy *Torchwood*



JONATHAN STRANGE AND MR NORRELL

STARBURST



TITANIC (2012)

and the sublime kids' adventure **The Sarah Jane Adventures**.

Then things started to go wrong. ITV followed up **Primeval** with the rancid **Demons** and churned out a barely watched drama about angels coming to earth and becoming lawyers (seriously... it was called **Eternal Law**). The BBC took a tumble with their reboot of Terry Nation's 1970s plague drama **Survivors**, space colony drama **Outcasts** (so unpopular it was swiftly taken out of primetime and dumped in a late night Sunday slot), time-bending cop show **Paradox** and Martin Shaw's intense possession drama **Apparitions**, BBC Three's attempts to follow-up the success of **Being Human**'s five-year run resulted in the BAFTA-winning (but poorly watched) **The Fades** and 'zombie' drama **In The Flesh**. And the less said about the recent **Tatau**, the better. BBC One's **Atlantis**, from the makers of the hugely popular **Merlin**, has been canned after just two series.

Now we have **Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell**, and I imagine that the inquests and post-mortems will be going on at wherever-the-BBC-is-based-these-days for some time. Internet murmurings have been suggesting that it's been the least successful BBC drama ever screened, and whilst I suspect that's highly unlikely, it's inarguable that, purely in terms of bums-on-seats, it's not covered itself in glory. But then should we be surprised? Ever the **Jonathan-Strange-Come-Lately**, the week before the first episode screened I risked a hernia by heaving my hardback edition of the novel down from the shelf where it'd been happily gathering dust (with some worthy intention of reading a week ahead of the TV serial) and by the first appendix (oh, those appendices!) I was wondering how on earth the BBC were going to adapt this and turn it into something millions of sleepy-headed Sunday night TV viewers would find unmissable. The fact that they patently *didn't* comes as no real surprise.

It's a great book (well, what I've read of it... I'm still labouring my way through it) and as a television production, it's absolutely exemplary - certainly from a visual perspective. The production

values are extraordinary - this is feature film stuff - the visual effects, whilst sparingly used, are top notch, the acting's really quite magnificent. It's one hell of an achievement - certainly from a Corporation being continually squeezed by real-terms reduced budgets (the licence fee looks set to be frozen again at next year's Charter renewal), threatened by a clearly unsympathetic Government, pilloried at every turn by an agenda-led British tabloid press and moaned at by a Joe Public constantly whingeing about paying £140 a year for a TV licence as they merrily fork out fifty or sixty quid a month to Rupert Murdoch and his Sky TV service. Ahem. But I think we can say with some certainty that when (or if) Susanna Clarke unveils the much-promised sequel to **Strange and Norrell**, the BBC won't be first in the queue for the TV adaptation rights. And I'd bet my weight in Wispa Golds (and that's a lot of Wispa Golds) that no other British broadcaster will either.

Here's a possibly apocryphal anecdote. In 2012, ITV aired a lavish four-part drama to commemorate the centenary of the sinking of the RMS

Titanic. It was called **Titanic** (not to be confused with King of the World Cameron's 1996 film which you may remember) and it was written by **Downton Abbey** creator Julian Fellowes. The series sank faster in the ratings than the ship on whose tragic story it was based. Much wailing and gnashing of teeth at ITV Network HQ where one senior executive is said to have declared "This proves science fiction doesn't work on TV!" This may or may not be true; I don't know, I wasn't there. But I'd put a bit of money on there being some truth in the tale. Because, **Doctor Who**'s success notwithstanding (and I'd argue that **Doctor Who** is very much a breed apart in this argument because of the sheer weight of its history and its now-recognised place as a British institution), British TV bods don't really 'get' the genre, whether it's science fiction, fantasy, heightened reality, horror. Some, it seems, don't actually really know what any of them are. Those that do vaguely understand that some people quite like it but they're wary of it, frightened by it, reluctant to get involved with it unless they really have to. **Doctor Who**'s success opened up a door to a type of programming British telly had shrugged off for years and, drooling after a bit more of the Doctor's popularity pie, both BBC and ITV decided to start poking the genre with a stick again to see if they could bring some new life into it. The fact that, by and large, they couldn't, is a combination of committee-led commissions borne out of genuine disinterest and the bemusement and confusion of an audience starved of home-grown imaginative entertainment for so long they've inevitably become as wary of the genre as the people trying to interest them in it. Why bother seeking out and investing in intelligent, speculative new drama series when there are still at least three chefs without their own series and anyway, isn't it time for a new adaptation of **Miss Marple** and hey, what about a series based on **Inspector Morse** as a foetus? Then there's the perfidious influence of a certain Mr Cowell and his



LIFE ON MARS



HUMANS

never ending freak-shows which have, in this writer's opinion, done almost irreparable damage to the British TV audience's ability to connect with a fictional story which doesn't involve 'real' people on a *journey*... but that's another soapbox entirely...

So what's all this got to do with **Strange and Norrell**? Accepting the fact that it was always a risky commission and a difficult fit for BBC One's demographic, it's easy to see quite why the BBC must have thought it worth a punt. Acclaimed novel, potential for rich, gorgeous visuals and its historical (or alt-historical) setting seems to play to the BBC's traditional costume drama strengths and it will probably become a decent overseas money-earner too (which might slightly sugar the bitter pill of its domestic failure). But, at the end of the day, it was still a broad, difficult, complicated fantasy drama full of magic (of the distinctly un-**Harry Potter** 'Expelliarmus!' variety), odd characters, baffling incidents, strange hair and a general sense of cold other-worldliness which was bound to turn off a Sunday night audience much more used to nice dramas featuring people in posh frocks sitting in drawing rooms or walking across moors. Some critics have suggested that **Strange and Norrell** might have been a better fit for BBC Two or even BBC Four; it might well have been, but those channels have their own drama budgets which are much smaller than those of BBC One and they just wouldn't have even been able to consider a production the scope and scale of the seven episodes which have just slipped by, barely noticed, on BBC One. As it stands, **Strange and Norrell** seems almost destined to be a show everyone working in British TV will laugh and point at if anyone dares suggest doing something a bit *different*, something a bit more fantastical...

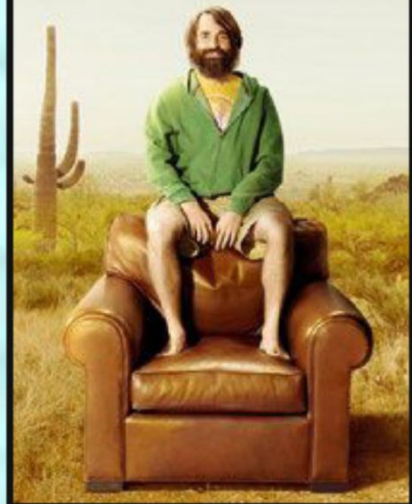
Or does it? I can't imagine we'll see something on **Strange and Norrell**'s scale again, but maybe that's a good thing. The very fact the show exists at all in the current TV economic climate is as good an advert for the continuation of the TV

licence as anything even my fevered imagination could dream up. But the BBC aren't likely to be in a hurry to spend that sort of dosh again (and I've no inside info as to what *that* sort of dosh actually was) on a quirky, demanding, at-best-cult-appeal genre show in the near future - which in some measure is a shame, but **Strange and Norrell** was always going to be a risk worth taking, albeit one that hasn't paid off this time.

Am I saying, then, that **Strange and Norrell**'s belly flop will close the door on any and all future British fantasy shows? Not necessarily - but it's certainly a fork in the road, a red flag to anyone thinking of making weird, ambitious fantasy dramas which can sometimes appeal to a very small core cult audience. Any knee-jerk refusal to engage with the genre aside, the way forward is likely to be slightly off-beat, but accessible dramas with one foot in the real world and, maybe, the other in some already-established mythology which the audience will already be familiar with. Channel 4's really very good **Humans** (airing, ironically, against **Strange and Norrell** for three weeks - and rating very much better) is a fine example of the former and ITV, still hankering after a touch of **Doctor Who**'s Saturday night magic, looks to be onto a winner with their upcoming **Jekyll and Hyde** adventure series (with Charlie Higson as showrunner), plus hopes are high for their series based on the legends of **Beowulf**. Even the BBC aren't yet completely scared off; **The Living and the Dead**, a new historical supernatural drama from BBC Wales, enters production early next month. Word of warning - it's created by Matthew Graham and Ashley Pharoah who gave us **Life on Mars**... and **Eternal Law**. It could go either way.

Potentially interesting times ahead, then, for fans of UK-originated genre telly. Of course we all love our big, loud, sprawling American shows - nobody does it better - but, as we've hopefully demonstrated elsewhere in this issue, British TV has done more than its bit for the genre over the last fifty or sixty years. It'd be a tragedy if one well-intentioned

ALSO SCREENING



THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

Will Forte plays Phil Miller, apparently the last man alive after a devastating virus has wiped out the rest of the Earth's population. Except he soon finds out he isn't... **Flight of the Conchords** star Kristen Schaal appears with **Mad Men** actress and STARBURST Radio favourite January Drones... sorry, Jones... in the hit US comedy series, already renewed for a second season.

From August on Dave

THE LAST SHIP

More post-apocalyptic fun as TNT's big, bombastic military action series returns for a second thirteen-episode season. Ratings are down in the US this year, so this could be the last journey for the beleaguered crew of the USS Nathan James. Expect shouting, glowering and lots of explosions.

Airing now on Sky1

FALLING SKIES

The fifth and final season of the Steven Spielberg exec-produced post-Earth invasion drama will hopefully see a final reckoning between Tom Mason and the mud-spattered survivors of the 3rd Mass as they continue their struggle against the alien skitters and their armoured Mech ground-warriors.

Airing now on FOX.

but misguided failure brought an end to British TV's often brittle relationship with the sorts of shows STARBURST readers know and love. We've had plenty of flops and disappointments over the last few years; time for a new British break-out hit, one which will get everyone - viewers and TV execs alike - excited again about the possibilities of a genre which, ironically, has endless possibilities...

Watch this space...

Contact me via the magic of email - paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing - @PMount

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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE



Bryce Dallas Howard discovers she has a nose

I wrote in the Issue 413 Editorial that I have always felt like a minority when it came to **Jurassic Park**. I had long been a fan of Michael Crichton's book **Westworld**, and the movie blew me away as a kid. It was the idea of a theme park of the future mixed with the disaster movie pastiche that was an irresistible formula for me, and my embryonic obsession with theme parks.

Jurassic Park was indeed a very important genre movie way back in 1993. Like **Terminator 2**, it had helped to give special effects a boost up to the next level, and for many, it felt like they had seen *real* dinosaurs for the first time on the big screen. The story of **Jurassic Park** was great, the cast and their characters were great, the effects were incredibly well realised, and yet I felt in a minority of punters that left the cinema slightly disappointed...

My feelings were certainly not shared by the rest of genre fans who quickly catapulted the movie into box office history. My problem has always been how small the actual scope of **Jurassic Park** was. I had not seen my "**Westworld** with dinosaurs", as the theme park was not operational. Instead we got an insurance inspection! Think I'm kidding? Watch it again. This was merely an inspection to make sure the park was safe to insure. Instead of a demented Alton Towers (too soon?) gone wrong, we just got a handful of characters running around trying to escape the island. It was only a step away from a **Star Wars** movie beginning with a trade blockade!

I actually preferred **The Lost World: Jurassic Park**, as I am a sucker for deserted theme parks, and I thought it was a far superior movie in terms of cinematography. I also really like the Pete Postlethwaite

character of Roland Tembo. A big game hunter with his eye on upping the ante and bagging a T-Rex. Unfortunately, the movie completely comes off the rails with a bizarre sequence of editing that completely fails to explain what the hell went on when the ship arrives in New York and the T-Rex goes on the rampage. To this day it makes no sense. Who killed the crew? **Jurassic Park III** is my least favourite although it was directed by Joe Johnston, a director whom I greatly admire for his period genre fare like the criminally underrated **The Rocketeer**. Sadly, this was a very standard romp that not even the return of Sam Neill and the addition of the excellent William H. Macy could rescue.

In a similar manner to Josh Trank bagging **Fantastic Four** as his second gig on the back of a low budget debut, Colin Trevorrow had only directed one movie prior to landing the belated follow-up **Jurassic World**. Happily for me, his debut **Safety Not Guaranteed** was one of my favourite movies of 2012. It was a movie straight out of left field, and is also one of my favourite time travel movies. The brief mission statement from Trevorrow confirmed that I was indeed getting my fully operational theme park. That was great news, but it was his description of the ethos which really impressed me. The image of a bored kid taking a selfie with dinosaurs behind him sold it to me. Mirroring the real world worry that audiences simply might have moved on from being impressed by CGI dinosaurs after 22 years...

I am relieved that **Jurassic World** is indeed the premise I was waiting to see since Michael Crichton wrote the original novel. I think **Jurassic World** is a great sequel that in itself is a retrospective of the franchise, and is fuelled by the human fear of the entropy caused by indifference and familiarity. Having been involved with several corporate situations, the need to develop new breeds and the rebranding to distance from the original disaster are particularly resonant. The effects are also up to par, even though they have not particularly improved on the original. Sadly, I just wish the cast was up to scratch as this proved to be yet another vehicle for the eminently watchable Mr Pratt. Bar the technician Lowery Cruthers

(sporting his eBay t-shirt) and CEO Simon Masrani, I really missed the ensemble feel of the previous movies, especially the first one. In particular Bryce Dallas Howard is a spectacular misstep of epic proportions...

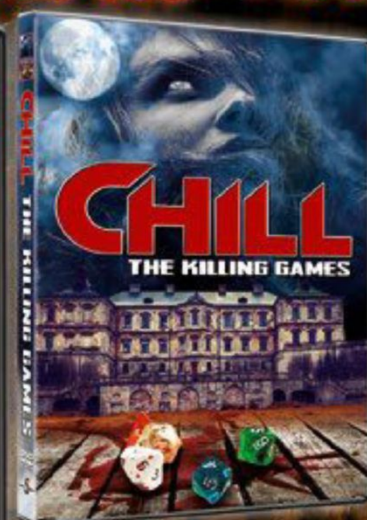
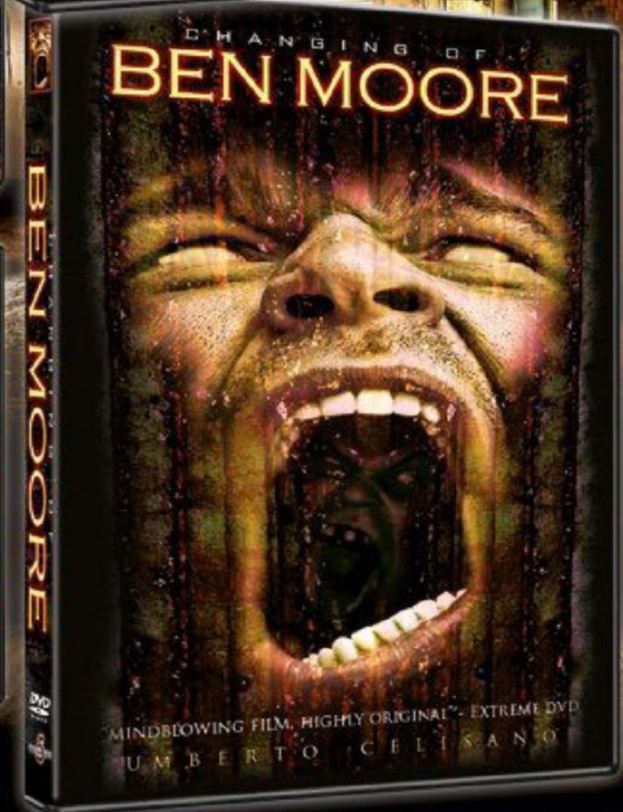
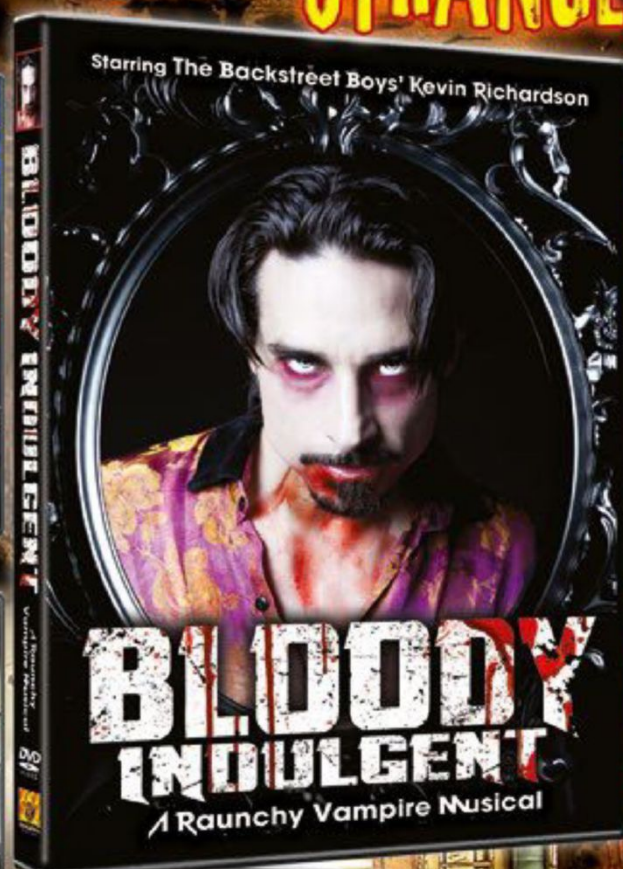
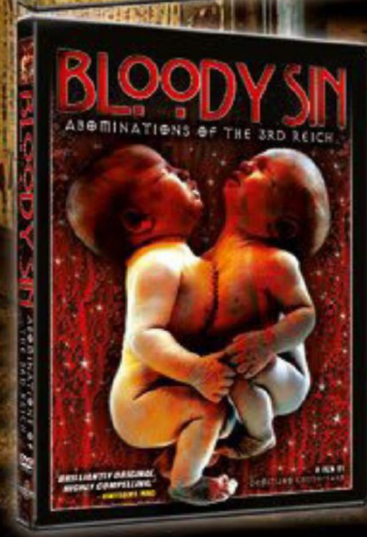
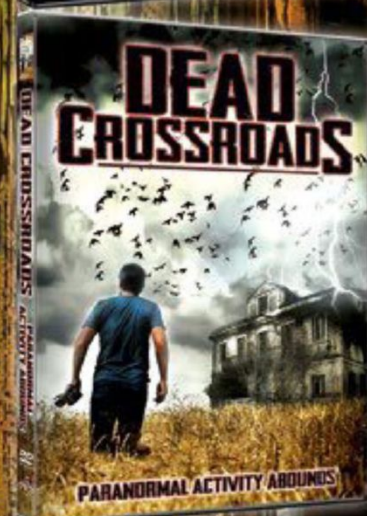
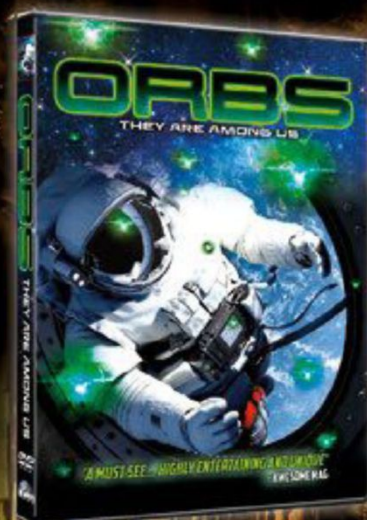
We have all seen the infamous Joss Whedon tweet that suggested the character of Claire Dearing was a '70s throwback. I hate to jump on any bandwagon unless I'm driving, but I can only agree with his sentiments. **Jurassic World** does seem to upset the feminist appellation at every turn. Even Hasbro joined the party when they decided to update their accompanying toy range with blurb that re-gendered the dinosaurs as male (apparently boys won't play with girl dinosaurs!). Unfortunately, in the first movie it was established that to prevent breeding there was never a leathery John Thomas in sight. The character of Claire Dearing is right in line with these sentiments, and plays a career woman with a womb, a vagina, and a hope that some guy will come along with the operating manual.

If you have any doubt that she is here merely for Owen Grady to defrost her knickers then you only have to watch the scene where she rescues him from a Pteranodon. Instead of thanking her, he rewards her with the kiss she so badly needed from the first frame! **Jurassic Woman**, oops, **Jurassic World** does have some other female characters though. There is her sister that cries in every scene, her PA who is as vacuous as an **SFX** reader - eventually ending up as a snack for a sea monster - and the moronic control room assistant with funny teeth, written solely to provide the only other worthwhile male character with a gag at the end. When you are yearning for the strength and determination provided by Laura Dern in the original, you know you are in trouble.

Jurassic World is, as I write this, a box office behemoth, and extremely well received. I just wish that it had a stronger cast, and that the lead female had not made the dinosaurs only a beard away from looking like hipsters. ✦

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

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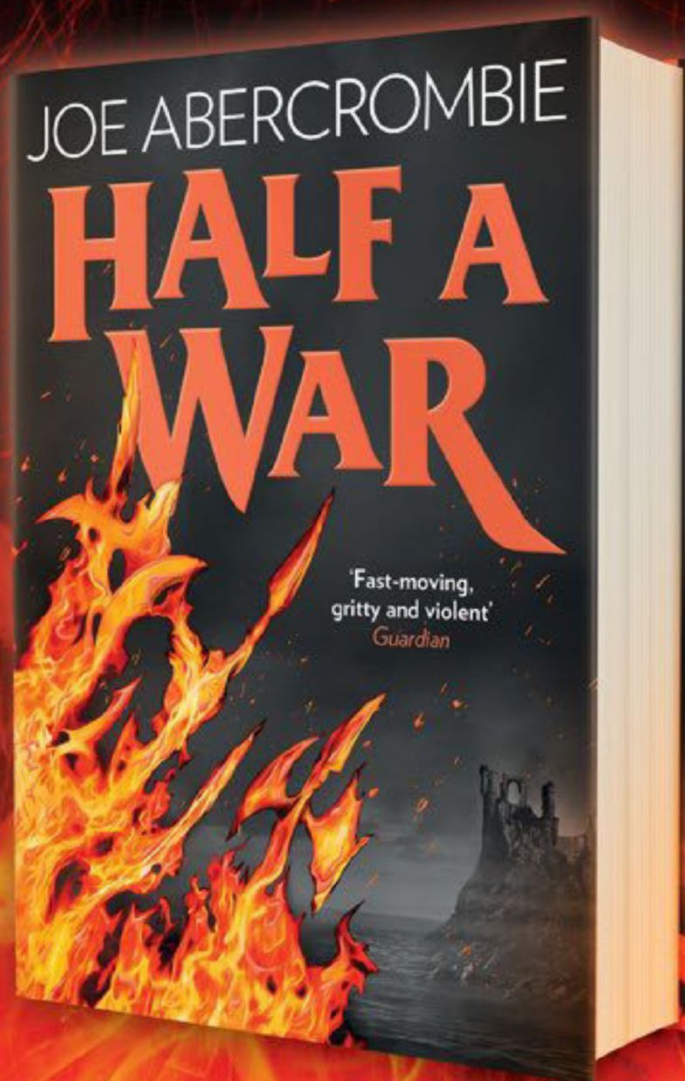


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